

**"TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE
DIACONATE IN THE
UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES"**

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INTRODUCTION OF THESIS

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (U.F.M.C.C.) was founded in 1968, as a Christian Church for all people with a special ministry to the gay community. In our Fellowship By-Laws, (Attachment No. 1) we state that we recognize an order of lay ministry, the diaconate. The description and the reality of that office reflects the eclectic ecclesiology of the U.F.M.C.C. The role of the Deacon in M.C.C. has never been thoroughly examined or explored; it has merely been assumed. Behind this problem lies the fact that our Church has not systematically examined either its ecclesiology or its theology of ministry in depth; rather, we have attempted to live out our individual perceptions of what M.C.C. is. We now have two commissions (Government, Structures and Systems; and Faith, Fellowship and Order) which are trying to get M.C.C. people to discuss and come to some consensus about important theological/practical issues. Part of the reason for our previous neglect of these tasks is the fact that we are so new, and the urgency of the work we are doing, locally and Fellowship-wide, seems to leave no time for the "luxury" of a thorough thinking-through of such matters. Also, I suspect that some of us are afraid we'll really find out what others of us really think!!!

Churches complain of not knowing how to train deacons, mostly, I suspect, because no one is quite sure what they are. The purpose of my project has been to come up with a tentative, working definition of the diaconate in M.C.C. My method consisted of: 1) research on the history of the diaconate in the Christian Church; 2) research on contemporary ecclesiology and theologies of ministry (particularly from the viewpoint of Liberation Theology) as they impinge on the diaconate; 3) reporting the results of a survey I designed and compiled for those in M.C.C. involved with the diaconate; 4) finding within M.C.C. documents the basis for a theology of ministry and ecclesiology that could help define the diaconate for M.C.C.; 5) the implementation of a training program for deacons in a local M.C.C. church which involved the trainees in developing an authentic definition of the diaconate for themselves and 6) the evaluation of that program and final conclusions and recommendations to the U.F.M.C.C. concerning the future of the diaconate.

CHAPTER 1

A Brief Overview of the Diaconate in Christian History

The word "deacon" is derived from the Greek word "diakonos." That word, in its first century usage meant "one who waits on tables;" "servant;" or "lackey."¹ In the New Testament, it is used in the Gospels in that sense, and by Jesus as a metaphor for ministry (Luke 22:27; Matthew 20:26-28). The New Testament writers use the term to describe Jesus' model of ministry (Philippians 2:7; Acts 3:13; 26; 4:27, 30; Romans 15:8). Also, "diakonos" becomes, in the New Testament, a general term for service or ministry.² This New Testament understanding pre-dates the development of a monarchical episcopate in the Church in which the diaconate became a stepping stone to priesthood.

Edward Echlin, in his book, *The Deacon in the Church*, also claims a strong connection between the Greek word "leiturgia" (translated "the work of the people," from which we derive our word "liturgy") and "diakonia."³ This connection originates in the Levite tradition of the post exilic Jews. Echlin claims that there is a connection between the "leiturgia" of the levitical assistants to priests in the temple (as doorkeepers, custodians of the sacred vessels, Deut. 14:26-29; 2 Samuel 6:9) and the "diakonia" of waiting on tables (1 Cor. 11; James 1:27).⁴ There seems to be a consistent tension between the cultic and service connotations of the word "diakonos," and consequently the term deacon.

The actual history of the office of deacon in the Church is more complicated. Harry Boer, in *A Short History of the Early Church*, says, quite bluntly, "When and how the office of deacon originated is not known."⁵ On the face of it, that isn't very encouraging. The fact is that the New Testament does not speak of a uniform ecclesiology of theology of ministry (they had the same problem that M.C.C. now faces!!). There are models and metaphors and references to charisms, gifts, offices, titles and disagreements about them, but no clearly revealed or "ordained" structure. Edward Schweizer speaks of this in his book, *Church Order in the New Testament*, in relationship to the ecclesiology of Luke-Acts:

"This almost casual mention of special office bearers in the Church, and the absence of definite titles, show that the order of these forms is not fundamental to the Lucan Church . . . very diverse forms, monarchical, oligarchical and democratic elements standing side by side." (p. 90)

Even Paul, Schweizer says, referring to the Church as the Body of Christ, speaks of many gifts and tasks, but no one order or system.⁶

There are only two New Testament passages which have been traditionally understood to speak of the origin or purpose of the diaconate: Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. There are problems with both these texts.

First of all, Acts 6:1-6 does not claim to tell the story of the origin of the diaconate, although it has been interpreted that way since Irenaeus made the connection.⁷ Scholars have debated the precise meaning of Acts 6:1-6. The story does not use the noun for deacon and it seems to "represent the rise of a Hellenistic office to counter Jewish control of the Church - a Hellenistic Seven to parallel the Jewish Twelve."⁸ Other scholars believe that the conflict was between Hellenistic Jews and Palestinian Jews (both Christians).⁹ Harry Boer sees this as the origin of elders (p. 23). The Acts passage is interesting in that the seven are elected, and there seems to be an acknowledgment of a need for persons to be set aside for the caring for human needs (feeding the poor). Certainly the event in Acts 6 is a precursor to the development of a Church office. However, at this stage, it seems to be a local matter, for local needs, not Church-wide. It is indigenous and spontaneous, not yet institutionalized. One must also remember that the Book of Acts is an idealized (and in this section, second-hand) account of Church origins. It is not at all clear that Luke intends for us to read this story as the story of the "first deacons."

1 Timothy is one of the pastoral epistles, whose authorship is questioned. The problem with 1 Timothy is its date. By the time 1 Timothy 3:8-13 was written, the office of deacon as a Church-wide office is assumed. By the time of the writing of the pastoral epistles, there has clearly been a major shift towards a hierarchical ecclesiology in a post-apostolic age. The Church apparently began with a fluid sense of Church order - with apostles, teachers, elders, prophets, etc. Gradually, however, the Church moved from this charismatic/servanthood style (not consistently ordered) to a monarchical episcopate.¹⁰ The reasons are probably many: the perceived need for "tightening control" in the face of persecution and "heresy;" the delay of the parousia, and the corresponding need for continuity in being faithful to the apostolic witness; and possibly the development of sacramentalism in which "great concern is focused on appointing guardians of the sacrament."¹¹ 1 Timothy is a product of this shift, and gives us no clues about the origins of the diaconate per se.

What do we know about this office of deacon which apparently emerges late in the first century?

From the writings of Bishop Ignatius of Antioch (our first clear picture of a monarchical bishop)¹² we are told that the deacon is a "special friend" to the Bishop.¹³ The deacon often functioned as the bishop's assistant, counselor, administrative aide and cultic servant, paralleling the temple tradition.¹⁴ During this period (the early second century) the Bishop was still the head of a local Church, not a large diocese. So, in a sense, the deacon was a "pastoral assistant." According to the *Didache* (the first known church manual/sacramentary, from the early second century) deacons were 1) not to be greedy, 2) to be appointed/ordained according to the needs and size of a congregation and 3) to be special ministers of the Eucharist.¹⁵ Further:

"... the deacon must be ready for whatever the Bishop directs. He may receive the contributions of the faithful, though passing them on at once to the bishop, and should minister devotedly to the sick and infirm, if necessary laying down his life for the brethren (sic)."¹⁶

Deacons are reported to have been active, in the early Church, in the ministries of the sacraments, word and charity.¹⁷ Sometimes they served as mediators of disputes, in listening to people's needs and complaints (the "eyes and ears of the bishop.")¹⁸ Deacons preached, taught and consoled. They were the doorkeepers at the liturgy (watching for persecutors, escorting the catechumens out of the sanctuary before Holy Communion).¹⁹

In the East, deacons were the "heralds" of the church in worship (possibly akin to being a "master of ceremonies," or the "liturgist" as we often say). The deacon in the East was responsible to lead the "bidding" prayers (community prayers) during worship.²⁰

The "Golden Age" of the diaconate really occurred during the latter days of persecution and the post-Nicene missionary age of the early church.²¹ During that time, bishops were frequently traveling, in prison, or hiding out. There were not enough bishops or priests to meet the pastoral and missionary needs of the early church. Deacons were needed to fill in, to function as pastors and missionaries.²² Deacons preached until the late 5th century²³ and were oftentimes functioning as the "managers of the community,"²⁴ possibly comparable to the "parish administrator" of contemporary American Catholic Churches. They developed comprehensive (for those times) social services in Rome²⁵ and an archdeacon (assistant to the Pope) actually became Pope without first being made a priest.²⁶

What happened to change the role of the deacon? Apparently, as the needs of the church began to change in the post-apostolic age, and with the rise of "sacerdotalism" the role of the deacon came into question. The Bishop/deacon relationship was essentially Hellenistic in origin, while the office of presbyter (elder or "priest") was of Jewish origin. Bishops were elders also²⁷, and these offices began co-existing. It becomes clear that priests who were not Bishops resented the "special friend" and seemingly privileged role of the deacon, believing that this should be reserved for the priest. There was resistance to the idea of a deacon being able to "fill in" for the Bishop or a priest. It was the viewpoint of the priests that there should be a strict ascending hierarchy of deacon-presbyter-bishop, and no permanent diaconate. Their viewpoint eventually won out, especially as the need for deacons to "fill in" declined.²⁸

One of the reasons for the decline in that need was the rise of monasticism, which captured the imagination of those attracted to the servanthood style of ministry. In many ways, one might say that the monastic movement took the place of the diaconate in acts of service, teaching and charity.²⁹ The end result was that the diaconate suffered as the institutionalization of the Church solidified, and it was trivialized into becoming only a ceremonial cultic role (assisting with the Eucharist), a temporary stepping stone to the priesthood. The permanent diaconate simply withered until: "On the eve of the Reformation ... his (the deacon's) was a preliminary albeit ascending grade in a pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy."³⁰ The Church had largely adopted the hierarchal model of the Roman Empire for Church government.

One of the cornerstones of the Reformation was the recognition of the incompatibility of this model with the New Testament and for the needs of the people. Calvin, in particular, sought to reorganize the Church in order (in his opinion) to bring it into conformity with what he perceived as a "pre-Dionysian" and "pre-hierarchal" New Testament order. The problem is, of course, that Calvin inferred a church order, or read it into the New Testament. In any case, Calvin attempted to restore the diaconate, not so much to have it as part of the clerical hierarchy, but as a lay office, as managers of the temporal affairs of the church.³¹ In addition, "Calvin attempted to restore the office of deacon to its original function (relief of human need). In Geneva, they took over the care of the poor, the needy and distressed, including the sick (hospitals).³² By "original function" Thompson is referring to Acts 6, and the assumption that that passage is the basis of the diaconate, an assumption I have questioned.

In any case, the Reformation brought with it a revival of the diaconate, taking many forms. Below is a brief list of the current practices in several mainline denominations:

Baptist: Deacons are elected by the congregation, not ordained, care for the spiritual life of the congregation, help the needy, assist in administration of baptism and Lord's Supper, discipline of careless Church members. Trustees handle finances.

Episcopal: The Bishop ordains men and women to the office of deacon, a step to the priesthood, help the priest with worship, especially Holy Communion; also seek out and serve the poor. *Perpetual Deacons:* ordained, assist at communion, teaching and caring for the sick and needy and indigent. Deacons are subject to the Bishop and must pass an examination on a course of study. There have been deaconesses, but these were religious orders, fading away with the advent of women's ordination.

Methodist: The office of deacon is the first stage on the way to ordination as an elder, usually occurs at the end of the first year of seminary, it is itself an ordained office, open to women and men. Works of charity are carried out by the Women's Society of Christian Service.

Presbyterian: Deacons are responsible to the Session yet called forth by the congregation, not seminary trained, yet ordained to this special task, flexible but concerned with broad spectrum of human needs, i.e., social justice matters, ministry to special groups within a community. They may or may not assist in the serving of communion. Includes women.

Roman Catholic: One of three minor orders, ordained, in the course of preparation for the priesthood. They are celibate in the Roman Rite. However, one of the most interesting developments has been the revival of the permanent diaconate in the post-Vatican II Church, in response to local needs for pastoral ministry. There has been discussion of and now use of married deacons (males), after a course of study and preparation they are ordained; to function permanently to preach, baptize, marry, but not say mass.

United Church of Christ: Differing definitions in different conferences; open to women and men; called by local congregation. Help pastor prepare people for baptism, confirmation, church membership, death and burial; prepare and distribute Holy Communion; being sensitive and responsive to local church needs.³³

In the next chapter, I will examine some questions arising from this overview.

The threefold ministry persisted in the church until the Roman hierarchical system modified it. As the Roman Catholic church made the pastor a priest the role of eldership became less significant. In time of multiple eldership in the local church became non-existent. The Protestant reformation saw the restoration of the eldership. Priests became pastors and lay-elders were instituted once again to give supportive leadership with their fellow elder, the pastor.

The Function of the Lay-elder

The management of the spiritual and material needs of any growing church is an extensive responsibility. One man cannot effectively carry out all functions implied in pastoral oversight. The pastor is the coordinator and general overseer of the work, but he must have supportive leaders to rightly carry out his function. To be chosen as a lay-elder is much more than an honor conferred by the congregation upon some faithful member. It is a calling. It is a ministry absolutely essential to the welfare of any local church. The lay-elders help the pastor with the task of oversight and with the shepherding of the flock of God.

As did the ancient elders in Israel so the modern elder will, to the extent of his gifts and assignments, help rule and care for the congregation. Multiple-eldership is a divine plan for expanding the work force of the local church. Only as the workers increase in number can the church grow numerically. Undershepherds working with the pastor-elder make possible a high level of people-centered pastoral care for even the largest church.

In many evangelical churches today the eldership is little more than an honor guard. Modern evangelicals do well to restudy the writings of the reformation on this subject. The newer denominations in particular have been derelict in establishing a truly New Testament church order. The renewal of lay participation in the assembly calls for a fresh consideration of the ancient but relevant ministry of lay elders.

¹ Kittle's Word Studies, Vol 6, pp. 662-680

² Thomas M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, Klock and Klock Christian Publisher, Minneapolis (1977 reprint), p. 170.

Who Are the Deacons?

The work of a deacon has often been defined as the trusteeship of the material aspects of the church. A broad spectrum of job descriptions are assigned them under this definition. Some churches give to the deacons the responsibility of collecting and distributing the benevolences of the church. Others make them the custodians of the properties of the assembly. Still others see the *diaconate* as accounting for the business and financial matters of the congregation.

Among Baptist churches the deacons are often assigned to the work that other church bodies give to the elders.

None of these systems seem to have a broad enough horizon for the *diaconate* when compared with the New Testament scriptures. It does not appear that they had the oversight of the church since that fell to the elders. However, the work of a deacon went beyond waiting on tables. One of few recorded sermons in the Book of Acts is by Stephen, the deacon, delivered before the highest Jewish executive body. He preached with power and skill. Another deacon driven from his home by persecution was God's instrument for the planting of a great church. The scriptures are careful to record an incident of his ability as a personal soul-winner. Every modern deacon should read Acts 8:26-40 and ask God to use him to win other men to Christ as Philip did.

The Meaning of the Word Deacon

The Greek word for deacon, *diakonos*, means one who serves or ministers. It applied to a household slave who waited on tables. Like many other words in the vernacular of that time the New Testament lifted this word *diakonos* to a much higher meaning. The *diakonos* of the New Testament church was a

minister of compassion officially appointed by the church. He held a place of dignity in the assembly. His ministry was supportive of the pastoral leadership and that of the lay elders.

The Origin of Deaconship

The scriptures have preserved the record of the origin of the *diaconate* or deaconship.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: When they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6—KJV)

The seven deacons chosen by the Jerusalem church were necessary to the welfare and growth of that great church. Deacons were selected to enlarge and to specialize the work force. They were to apply their gifts and wisdom to the social needs of the assembly in order to free the preaching staff from the details involved in such ministry.

Acts not only gives the genesis of the deaconship but also gives some essential insights into the qualities of deacons as well. The manner of selecting and consecrating the deacons in this first church verify the importance of the office.

Some Bible scholars are persuaded that even before the appointment of the seven an order of servants existed in the church which finally emerged as the deaconship. The scripture sighted for this is Acts 5:6. In the account of the remarkable

judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, the young men were summoned to remove the bodies from the place of assembly. *Neoteroi* translated "young" may refer to the first deacon, suggested by the use of this term in Luke 22:26.

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. (Luke 22:24-26—KJV)

Christ was suggesting such a ministry to be a part of the leadership of the church. *Neoteroi* carried such a meaning in Greek usage.

The church in Jerusalem provides an excellent model for the development of the elders and deacons. This new order of ministry was created to meet the leadership needs of that growing congregation. The guidance of the Holy Spirit was sought in the forming of the office and in the selection of men to fill that office.

The Jerusalem church by active and continuous evangelism had won to Christ scores of Hellenistic Jews as well as Aramaic-speaking Jews. The new assembly soon discovered tension developing between these two ethnic groups. The peculiar circumstances under which the church ministered added to the problem. Fanatic persecution from the non-Christian community had left many believers totally destitute. More fortunate members were willing to make great sacrifices of their material wealth so that the needy in the Christian community might be adequately cared for. The pressure of feeding hundreds of people each day produced problems. The apostolic leaders were guided by the Holy Spirit to resolve these problems by adding to the church's work force the *diaconate* or the deacons.

By the end of the apostolic period the office of deacon was well established in the life of the church. It has survived until modern times and is currently reaching a new place of importance in the ministry of the church.

The Cultural Background of the *Diaconate*

The Greek word, *diakonos*, from which we get deacon, means a servant. In the Gentile culture to be a servant was usually to be a slave, a position of inferiority. The only exception to this was when the term occasionally was applied to some form of government service.

The perception of a servant was quite different in Jewish culture. The position of a servant was not considered inferior. In fact to be the servant of a good and great master was thought to be a high honor. The *diaconate* was born in the Jewish churches and probably reflected their understanding of servanthood. As the church grew and crossed cultural lines the *diaconate* survived and increased in importance. The pagan idea of inferiority was not applied to the servants of the church. The deacons of the early church were men of humility but not inferior men. This was an office respected by the church, one extremely important to the well-being of the church.

The Duties of the Office of Deacon

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. (Phil. 1:1)

By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians the office of deacon had become firmly established in the church. Paul and Timothy addressed the believers of that assembly and then the office-bearers of the assembly, the bishops and the deacons. These two offices had the administrative responsibilities and no doubt had been the official channel of correspondence with Paul and Timothy. In behalf of the congregation the bishops and deacons had sent funds for the support of Paul's ministry. Hendrich Meyer, German theologian of the nineteenth century, suggests that Paul addressed the leaders in this special way because of the nature of his letter. It was not only an epistle of teaching but it was a thank you letter for their financial support.¹ This would suggest that early Christians had a very sophisticated system of stewardship. Individuals had given their gifts to the church, which had sent the gifts to Paul through their appro-

priate officers. This would account for the salutation to the church officers only in the letter to the Philippians.

The founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Dr. A. B. Simpson, understood deacons to be significant in the government of the church.

"There was a second class of officers called deacons. The word denotes a minister; that is, one who ministers—a servant to the church. This sufficiently covers the office of deacon as it is usually exercised today in Christian churches, the ministry of hospitality, kindness to the sick, the stranger, and the sufferer, and relief to the poor and needy. These ministries are so important that the office of deacon was the first to be filled by the apostolic church . . ."²

The church during the days of its greatest spiritual power was the most active in ministries of compassion to suffering people. The deacons were responsible for the leadership of this manifestation of love. We are not told in scripture that the *diaconate* of the primitive church ministered to the needy of society in general. The scriptural record relates to the suffering within the church.

But it must be kept in mind that the deacons did more than minister to the poor. The Jerusalem church was under such intense persecution that much of the congregation were suffering poverty. The first seven deacons were set aside to direct the ministry to this needy multitude.

The situation at Philippi was quite different. There is no evidence of poverty there. The congregation was able on more than one occasion to send financial support to the apostle Paul and his missionary team. Yet this church had deacons and they were so prominent as to receive special greetings from Paul. Some scholars have attempted to prove that deacons were elected only in those churches having a problem with poverty. The New Testament data does not support that premise. If deacons were a norm in the churches of that day, their function must have included a larger ministry than was first assigned them in Acts chapter six. While the scriptures provide no examples of the *diaconate* ministering to the physical needs of the non-Christian community this could have been the case in

churches where the believers themselves suffered no poverty. The very spirit of Christian charity seems to call for this kind of ministry. It has occurred in the subsequent history of the church again and again.

The duties of the deacon in the days of the apostles was evidently larger than a ministry of waiting on tables. They ministered to spiritual needs as well as to physical needs.

In the post-apostolic period deacons continued to be an essential office of ministry. Clement of Rome, one of the church fathers, in a reference to the spread of the gospel speaks of the continued importance of deacons in his time. He refers to the apostles,

"having received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and conformed in the Word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe."³

The duties of a deacon are further amplified by the ministry of Philip, one of the original seven deacons in Jerusalem. Persecution became so intense that Philip along with most of the leaders of the Christian church had to flee Jerusalem for their lives. Philip went north to Samaria and began to preach the gospel.

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

And there was much rejoicing in that city. (Acts 8:4-8)

The ministry of Philip in this rather alien community produced a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Apparently Philip did not engage in the usual work of deacons, but seeing the spiritual condition of the city he gave himself to preaching Christ. There was such obvious anointing of the Holy Spirit on his preaching that great crowds of people came to hear Philip. He was also used of God to heal the sick and to exorcise demons.

The effect of deacon Philip's preaching was the gathering of a sizable congregation of believers. The church in Jerusalem, hearing of the working of God in Samaria, delegated Peter and John to perfect the faith and order of this new church.

The ministry of Philip not only included successful church planting but he excelled as well in personal evangelism.

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter;

And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,

So He does not open his mouth.

In humiliation His judgment was taken away;

Who shall relate His generation?

For His life is removed from the earth."

And the eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?"

And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:26-40)

Philip, a Spirit-filled man, could sense the leading of the Holy Spirit in his life. The directive to go to the desert was obeyed without hesitation, and there, by divine appointment, Philip met the Ethiopian. What better situation for personal evangelism, a prepared witness and a seeking soul brought together. Personal soul winning after this pattern should be the experience of all church officers and especially the deacons.

Philip so developed his gifts that he became an evangelist. Scripture does not indicate that he gave up the office of deacon, but since the ministry of an evangelist is to the churches at large and the ministry of the deacon to the local assembly, it can be assumed that he accepted the responsibility of the larger office of evangelist.

Stephen enjoyed a leadership role far beyond the management of food distribution among the needy. His spiritual gifts and testimony for Christ brought him into the public eye. So threatening was the spiritual power of this man that the enemies of Christianity had him put to death. The church should remember that the first martyr of the new age was a deacon. This speaks well of the spirituality and significance of that office.

The ability of Stephen to carry on dialogue with the non-

Christian leadership in the community was critical. So skillful were his arguments on the behalf of the gospel of Christ they could not be refuted. Stephen was an able defender of the faith. Though he paid with his life, Stephen, by the grace of God, presented the gospel to the most difficult segment of Judaism.

The *diaconate* then was a feeder of other orders of ministry in the church. Evangelists, elders, pastors came from the ranks of the deacons. The rather low view of this office in some evangelical churches stifles the full usefulness of the *diaconate*.

Donald J. MacNair, executive of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, shatters this traditional view of deacons when he says,

"One major truth about the service of the deacon comes through this entire study. The original seven were not simply delivery boys. These men were to use their office and the physical resources at their disposal to bring unity back to the local body of believers to do a mighty and spiritual service."⁴

MacNair makes a point of the responsibility of deacons not only to relieve needs but to deal with the underlying causes of those needs. The deacon then must be sensitive, wise, and knowledgeable of scripture to exercise such an important spiritual ministry.

¹ H. W. A. Meyer, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1875, p. 13.

² A. B. Simpson, *The Epistles of Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus*, Christian Publications, Inc., Harrisburg, p. 69.

³ Quote from William Lefroy, *The Christian Ministry*, Funk & Wagnalls, London, 1891, p. 140.

⁴ Donald J. MacNair, *The Growing Local Church*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1975, p. 111.

The Scriptural Qualifications of Deacons

The qualifications of a deacon may be drawn from two passages in the New Testament. The establishment of the ministry of deacons as recorded in Acts chapter six provides a partial list of qualifications for this office.

But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (Acts 6:3)

The deacon, like the elder, must be a man with a good reputation not only in the church but in the community as well. The duties of his office call for the highest level of confidence. As a very important lay leader the deacon should have the trust of the membership.

The apostles agreed that the deacons selected from the fellowship should be Spirit-filled men. Though their ministry was largely the administration of material things, Spirit-filled men were essential for the oversight of this task. The work assigned the deacons was an integral part of the church's overall ministry.

No dichotomy exists between the spiritual and the material ministries of the church. The deacons elected to wait tables in the household of faith are as much in need of the fullness of the Holy Spirit as the elders who minister the Word.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit is just as essential for service as He is for holy living. Christians so often experience futility in their efforts at service in most instances because of the absence of anointing for service. The norm for every Christian is to be Spirit-filled.

The third characteristic of good deacons given by the apostles was wisdom. The deacon was assigned to an important task

requiring him not only to serve himself but to enlist and oversee others in the accomplishment of the task. The deacons were called upon frequently to make decisions and to deal with the problems of people. The deacon must be wise in the sense that he has developed the skill of applying his knowledge in a given situation. He should be a man of good judgment.

As the church grew and spread beyond Palestine to the Gentiles the office of deacon became more important in the life of the church. When Paul instructed Timothy in matters of church order he advised him to have deacons in the churches. Paul's instructions included a guideline of qualifications to assure spiritual leadership in the office of deacon comparable to the standards for the office of elder.

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. . . .

Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:8-10, 12-13)

The similarities as well as the differences of the qualifications of deacons to that of elders are important. Three qualities of a deacon are exactly like the qualities of eldership.

The deacon's home life is very important. He must have a solid marriage that meets scriptural standards. He must also have a well-ordered home. His children should reflect in their conduct the Christian atmosphere of the home. The support of a godly wife is certainly implied in this passage.

With the widespread need to strengthen the family this requisite for leadership should not be taken lightly by any church.

The deacon like the elder is not to be addicted to wine. The collective judgment of our fellowship from its inception until now is that believers should not use any form of alcoholic beverages. Since alcoholism is now the most threatening form

of drug abuse in western society the Christian community must refrain all the more from the use of alcoholic beverages. The deacons and the elders must provide a wholesome example by their own abstinence.

The financial practices of a candidate for the office of deacon ought not to be overlooked. The scriptures say that he is not to "be fond of sordid gain." The word *sordid* infers a shameful or dishonest gain. When one's love for money and material things is so overpowering that he is willing to compromise Christian principles to get money he is not qualified for church leadership. The deacon like the elder should be above reproach in financial matters. He should have a Spirit-given capacity to use his possessions as a stewardship for the glory of Christ. The way a man handles money is the key to his whole value system. An officer of the church who has responsibility for an important share of the finances should have a deep commitment to the values set forth in the gospel. He not only has responsibility to account for the fund, but he must by his own attitude toward money lead the church to the sanctified management of its resources.

Paul speaks not only of the characteristics of deacons that are similar to those of the elders, but he adds some characteristics not found in the list for elders. Paul advises Timothy that men of dignity should be selected for the *diaconate*. The image of the deacon should be one that commands respect. A deacon must deal with all kinds and all ages of people in the course of his duties. As a servant of Christ his bearing should enable him to minister to all.

The idea of dignity is somewhat tarnished in modern culture. So many leaders in high places have failed that cynicism has taken over in the populous. The unfortunate result of this situation is the immortalization of the undignified. The church is obligated to counter such fuzzy thinking and reassert the credibility of dignity. It is needed in the home, in the government, and in the church. Holy Spirit-implanted dignity is a quality of Christian character.

The person selected to serve as a deacon should be in control not only of his walk but also of his talk. In this ministry the deacon will be in constant contact with people in their homes, making him aware of problems that should never be discussed outside one's secret prayer closet. Careless talk damages the

work and the reputation of fellow believers. It is significant that this quality be singled out and emphasized in the instruction for deacons, and that he be encouraged to strictly adhere to this. It is a quality that should be emulated by elders and by every Christian. It is especially important that deacons avoid a double-tongue (1 Tim. 3:8). The Greek word translated *double-tongue* carries the connotation of talebearing. The seriousness of this sin can be more readily understood by comparing Proverbs 11:13 with 1 Timothy 3:8:

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter. (Prov. 11:13)

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain. (1 Tim. 3:8)

The control of the tongue is a necessity to the deacon's ministry of compassion and understanding. Only the trustworthy can visit from house to house and enjoy the high privilege of such direct exposure to the weaknesses and faults of the saints. The deacon, and for that matter any leader, can minister only to those who trust him.

The office of deacon requires not only qualities of Christian character; it also requires a deep knowledge of the things of God. Paul says,

But holding to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. (1 Tim. 3:9)

The mystery of faith speaks of an objective faith, the content of faith. These servants of the church must have more than an ordinary understanding of that body of truth which constitutes the gospel. Deacons should be men who know and love the Word of God. The great doctrines of the Bible are their spiritual sustenance. Deacons are to minister truth with compassion.

This office, like that of the elder, is not for the novice; it requires maturity. Paul instructed Timothy that deacons were to be "tested."

And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. (1 Tim. 3:10)

Paul's use of the present imperative suggests that the testing of the man should be over a period of time. Some have erroneously concluded that deacons should have a probation period after their election to office. Paul is not suggesting a probation; he is calling for care in the selection of the deacons. Only those who have proven themselves should be considered for the office. R. C. H. Lenski, a Lutheran scholar, supports this position by calling attention to the kind of men selected in Acts six for the *diaconate*. They were tried and proven men, selected from the very best to serve as deacons.

The office of deacon should never be used as a ploy to entice some inactive member into ministry. The deacons are to come from those already active in ministry.

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:13)

A distinction must be made in this verse between the technical and non-technical use of the word *deacon*. Paul is saying that those selected for the office of deacon should be men who have already served the church well by their unofficial ministry. Faithful service is the most likely way for a promising leader to come to the attention of his brethren. The New International Version seems a better translation of this verse.

Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:13—NIV)

The practice of translating the participle *oi diakonasantes* as the work of a deacon comes from the Episcopal approach to the office of deacon. They follow Catholic tradition which looked upon the *diaconate* as a step in the ranks of the clergy: Men are first ordained deacons and then priests and then bishops. While it is true both from scripture and tradition that some deacons entered the ministry or became elders the Episcopal system can

hardly be justified either from this scripture or the church's experience.

Paul is here discussing the qualifications of a good deacon. Paul's concern is that the church select men who have already proven themselves in fruitful ministry. The apostle hastens to explain that active laymen are acquiring a good standing and great boldness in their faith. Spiritual growth for them is the by-product of dedicated ministry.

Deaconesses

No consideration of this passage would be complete without a careful interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11:

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

The use of *women* rather than *wives* indicates that among those serving in the church's ministry of compassion were women or deaconesses. While the New Testament does not mention an office of deaconess, this verse along with Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 5:9-10 indicate that women had a definite ministry in the early church.

Four qualifications are given for those women who serve the church as deaconesses. They are essentially the same qualifications as those required of deacons.

Among the women who ministered were the widows. Paul's instructions to Timothy suggest a category of widows enrolled by the church and supported by the church.

Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. (1 Tim. 5:9-10)

The regulations called for women sixty years of age or older

with a record of godly deportment. They no doubt were given opportunities of ministry among the saints such as prayer, teaching younger women, and probably as strength permitted ministry to the sick and suffering. References to their work may be found in writings of the Church Fathers.

H. P. Tiddon, Anglican scholar, suggests that women were admitted to the order of widows on the basis of past active service for Christ. Since advanced age prevented the continuation of that same level of active ministry, the widows gave themselves to devotional ministry rather than the practice of philanthropy.¹

Sixty does not seem to be an advanced age in modern terms, but considering the shorter life expectancy in the first century, a person reaching sixty years of age was considered very elderly. However, at least one ancient source, the Theodosian Code, sets sixty as the age for deaconesses. The council of Chalcedon set forty as the minimum age of a deaconess.²

It cannot be established that the church supported widows from the days of the apostles. They were considered deaconesses, but they did constitute a work force of devoted women essential to the church's total ministry. During the post-Apostolic age the order of widows was gradually absorbed by the order of deaconesses.

Kittle's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* suggests that the instruction given the older women in Titus 2:3-5 may provide some insight into the nature of the ministry carried on by widows.³

Paul says to Titus:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3-5)

These mature, godly women had a responsibility of pastoral care to the young wives of the congregation. The elders and

deacons of the primitive church recognized the role of women in Christian service and provided legitimate outlets of ministry for them.

Phoebe, of Cenchrea, was a business woman who traveled as far as Rome in the course of her activities. In her home church she served as a deaconess and by her faithful ministry won the commendation of the apostle Paul.

The pastoral epistles provide the divine standard for church order. The Holy Spirit gave Paul for the church a basic principal to be followed in selecting leaders and workers. They were all required to be spiritually minded and above reproach in their walk before men.

¹ H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy*. Klock and Klock: Minneapolis, reprint 1978, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IX, Wm. B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, 1978 edition, pp. 456, 457.

The Ministry of the Lay-Elders

The lay-elder is a member of the local church leadership team, working in a Spirit-directed community. The eldership is not a show room for individualism but an opportunity to coordinate with the whole body the Spirit-imparted gift or gifts of ministry. Lay-elders have a large and diversified range of work. A number of leaders with differing gifts can be involved.

The lay eldership is the pastor-elder's strongest support. They are his immediate helpers in the pastoral task of caring for the church. While the work of elders touches all the ministries of the church the focus of the eldership is upon the spiritual ministries. Every church should have a job description which details the functions assigned the lay-elders. The pastor's input in drafting this document is critical, for he is the supervisor of the elders since their activities relates to his work. The lay-elders, more than any other members in the assembly, assist the pastor or pastors.

Most of the functions of the eldership fall within the circle of pastoral care. The pastor must know that the elders are committed and prepared for the kinds of spiritual duties they are expected to carry out. It is for this reason the scriptural qualifications for lay-elders are as high as those of the pastor-elder.

The best overview of pastoral care found in scripture is Paul's address to the Ephesian elders.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

The writer to the Hebrews particularizes the pastoral role.

The threefold ministry persisted in the church until the Roman hierarchical system modified it. As the Roman Catholic church made the pastor a priest the role of eldership became less significant. In time of multiple eldership in the local church became non-existent. The Protestant reformation saw the restoration of the eldership. Priests became pastors and lay-elders were instituted once again to give supportive leadership with their fellow elder, the pastor.

The Function of the Lay-elder

The management of the spiritual and material needs of any growing church is an extensive responsibility. One man cannot effectively carry out all functions implied in pastoral oversight. The pastor is the coordinator and general overseer of the work, but he must have supportive leaders to rightly carry out his function. To be chosen as a lay-elder is much more than an honor conferred by the congregation upon some faithful member. It is a calling. It is a ministry absolutely essential to the welfare of any local church. The lay-elders help the pastor with the task of oversight and with the shepherding of the flock of God.

As did the ancient elders in Israel so the modern elder will, to the extent of his gifts and assignments, help rule and care for the congregation. Multiple-eldership is a divine plan for expanding the work force of the local church. Only as the workers increase in number can the church grow numerically. Undershepherds working with the pastor-elder make possible a high level of people-centered pastoral care for even the largest church.

In many evangelical churches today the eldership is little more than an honor guard. Modern evangelicals do well to restudy the writings of the reformation on this subject. The newer denominations in particular have been derelict in establishing a truly New Testament church order. The renewal of lay participation in the assembly calls for a fresh consideration of the ancient but relevant ministry of lay elders.

¹ Kittle's Word Studies, Vol 6, pp. 662-680

² Thomas M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, Klock and Klock Christian Publisher, Minneapolis (1977 reprint), p. 170.

Who Are the Deacons?

The work of a deacon has often been defined as the trusteeship of the material aspects of the church. A broad spectrum of job descriptions are assigned them under this definition. Some churches give to the deacons the responsibility of collecting and distributing the benevolences of the church. Others make them the custodians of the properties of the assembly. Still others see the *diaconate* as accounting for the business and financial matters of the congregation.

Among Baptist churches the deacons are often assigned to the work that other church bodies give to the elders.

None of these systems seem to have a broad enough horizon for the *diaconate* when compared with the New Testament scriptures. It does not appear that they had the oversight of the church since that fell to the elders. However, the work of a deacon went beyond waiting on tables. One of few recorded sermons in the Book of Acts is by Stephen, the deacon, delivered before the highest Jewish executive body. He preached with power and skill. Another deacon driven from his home by persecution was God's instrument for the planting of a great church. The scriptures are careful to record an incident of his ability as a personal soul-winner. Every modern deacon should read Acts 8:26-40 and ask God to use him to win other men to Christ as Philip did.

The Meaning of the Word Deacon

The Greek word for deacon, *diakonos*, means one who serves or ministers. It applied to a household slave who waited on tables. Like many other words in the vernacular of that time the New Testament lifted this word *diakonos* to a much higher meaning. The *diakonos* of the New Testament church was a

minister of compassion officially appointed by the church. He held a place of dignity in the assembly. His ministry was supportive of the pastoral leadership and that of the lay elders.

The Origin of Deaconship

The scriptures have preserved the record of the origin of the *diaconate* or deaconship.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: When they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6—KJV)

The seven deacons chosen by the Jerusalem church were necessary to the welfare and growth of that great church. Deacons were selected to enlarge and to specialize the work force. They were to apply their gifts and wisdom to the social needs of the assembly in order to free the preaching staff from the details involved in such ministry.

Acts not only gives the genesis of the deaconship but also gives some essential insights into the qualities of deacons as well. The manner of selecting and consecrating the deacons in this first church verify the importance of the office.

Some Bible scholars are persuaded that even before the appointment of the seven an order of servants existed in the church which finally emerged as the deaconship. The scripture sighted for this is Acts 5:6. In the account of the remarkable

judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, the young men were summoned to remove the bodies from the place of assembly. *Neoteroi* translated "young" may refer to the first deacon, suggested by the use of this term in Luke 22:26.

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. (Luke 22:24-26—KJV)

Christ was suggesting such a ministry to be a part of the leadership of the church. *Neoteroi* carried such a meaning in Greek usage.

The church in Jerusalem provides an excellent model for the development of the elders and deacons. This new order of ministry was created to meet the leadership needs of that growing congregation. The guidance of the Holy Spirit was sought in the forming of the office and in the selection of men to fill that office.

The Jerusalem church by active and continuous evangelism had won to Christ scores of Hellenistic Jews as well as Aramaic-speaking Jews. The new assembly soon discovered tension developing between these two ethnic groups. The peculiar circumstances under which the church ministered added to the problem. Fanatic persecution from the non-Christian community had left many believers totally destitute. More fortunate members were willing to make great sacrifices of their material wealth so that the needy in the Christian community might be adequately cared for. The pressure of feeding hundreds of people each day produced problems. The apostolic leaders were guided by the Holy Spirit to resolve these problems by adding to the church's work force the *diaconate* or the deacons.

By the end of the apostolic period the office of deacon was well established in the life of the church. It has survived until modern times and is currently reaching a new place of importance in the ministry of the church.

The Cultural Background of the *Diaconate*

The Greek word, *diakonos*, from which we get deacon, means a servant. In the Gentile culture to be a servant was usually to be a slave, a position of inferiority. The only exception to this was when the term occasionally was applied to some form of government service.

The perception of a servant was quite different in Jewish culture. The position of a servant was not considered inferior. In fact to be the servant of a good and great master was thought to be a high honor. The *diaconate* was born in the Jewish churches and probably reflected their understanding of servanthood. As the church grew and crossed cultural lines the *diaconate* survived and increased in importance. The pagan idea of inferiority was not applied to the servants of the church. The deacons of the early church were men of humility but not inferior men. This was an office respected by the church, one extremely important to the well-being of the church.

The Duties of the Office of Deacon

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. (Phil. 1:1)

By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians the office of deacon had become firmly established in the church. Paul and Timothy addressed the believers of that assembly and then the office-bearers of the assembly, the bishops and the deacons. These two offices had the administrative responsibilities and no doubt had been the official channel of correspondence with Paul and Timothy. In behalf of the congregation the bishops and deacons had sent funds for the support of Paul's ministry. Hendrich Meyer, German theologian of the nineteenth century, suggests that Paul addressed the leaders in this special way because of the nature of his letter. It was not only an epistle of teaching but it was a thank you letter for their financial support.¹ This would suggest that early Christians had a very sophisticated system of stewardship. Individuals had given their gifts to the church, which had sent the gifts to Paul through their appro-

priate officers. This would account for the salutation to the church officers only in the letter to the Philippians.

The founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Dr. A. B. Simpson, understood deacons to be significant in the government of the church.

"There was a second class of officers called deacons. The word denotes a minister; that is, one who ministers—a servant to the church. This sufficiently covers the office of deacon as it is usually exercised today in Christian churches, the ministry of hospitality, kindness to the sick, the stranger, and the sufferer, and relief to the poor and needy. These ministries are so important that the office of deacon was the first to be filled by the apostolic church . . ."²

The church during the days of its greatest spiritual power was the most active in ministries of compassion to suffering people. The deacons were responsible for the leadership of this manifestation of love. We are not told in scripture that the *diaconate* of the primitive church ministered to the needy of society in general. The scriptural record relates to the suffering within the church.

But it must be kept in mind that the deacons did more than minister to the poor. The Jerusalem church was under such intense persecution that much of the congregation were suffering poverty. The first seven deacons were set aside to direct the ministry to this needy multitude.

The situation at Philippi was quite different. There is no evidence of poverty there. The congregation was able on more than one occasion to send financial support to the apostle Paul and his missionary team. Yet this church had deacons and they were so prominent as to receive special greetings from Paul. Some scholars have attempted to prove that deacons were elected only in those churches having a problem with poverty. The New Testament data does not support that premise. If deacons were a norm in the churches of that day, their function must have included a larger ministry than was first assigned them in Acts chapter six. While the scriptures provide no examples of the *diaconate* ministering to the physical needs of the non-Christian community this could have been the case in

churches where the believers themselves suffered no poverty. The very spirit of Christian charity seems to call for this kind of ministry. It has occurred in the subsequent history of the church again and again.

The duties of the deacon in the days of the apostles was evidently larger than a ministry of waiting on tables. They ministered to spiritual needs as well as to physical needs.

In the post-apostolic period deacons continued to be an essential office of ministry. Clement of Rome, one of the church fathers, in a reference to the spread of the gospel speaks of the continued importance of deacons in his time. He refers to the apostles.

"having received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and conformed in the Word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe."³

The duties of a deacon are further amplified by the ministry of Philip, one of the original seven deacons in Jerusalem. Persecution became so intense that Philip along with most of the leaders of the Christian church had to flee Jerusalem for their lives. Philip went north to Samaria and began to preach the gospel.

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

And there was much rejoicing in that city. (Acts 8:4-8)

The ministry of Philip in this rather alien community produced a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Apparently Philip did not engage in the usual work of deacons, but seeing the spiritual condition of the city he gave himself to preaching Christ. There was such obvious anointing of the Holy Spirit on his preaching that great crowds of people came to hear Philip. He was also used of God to heal the sick and to exorcise demons.

The effect of deacon Philip's preaching was the gathering of a sizable congregation of believers. The church in Jerusalem, hearing of the working of God in Samaria, delegated Peter and John to perfect the faith and order of this new church.

The ministry of Philip not only included successful church planting but he excelled as well in personal evangelism.

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open his mouth.

In humiliation His judgment was taken away;

Who shall relate His generation?

For His life is removed from the earth."

And the eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?"

And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:26-40)

Philip, a Spirit-filled man, could sense the leading of the Holy Spirit in his life. The directive to go to the desert was obeyed without hesitation, and there, by divine appointment, Philip met the Ethiopian. What better situation for personal evangelism, a prepared witness and a seeking soul brought together. Personal soul winning after this pattern should be the experience of all church officers and especially the deacons.

Philip so developed his gifts that he became an evangelist. Scripture does not indicate that he gave up the office of deacon, but since the ministry of an evangelist is to the churches at large and the ministry of the deacon to the local assembly, it can be assumed that he accepted the responsibility of the larger office of evangelist.

Stephen enjoyed a leadership role far beyond the management of food distribution among the needy. His spiritual gifts and testimony for Christ brought him into the public eye. So threatening was the spiritual power of this man that the enemies of Christianity had him put to death. The church should remember that the first martyr of the new age was a deacon. This speaks well of the spirituality and significance of that office.

The ability of Stephen to carry on dialogue with the non-

Christian leadership in the community was critical. So skillful were his arguments on the behalf of the gospel of Christ they could not be refuted. Stephen was an able defender of the faith. Though he paid with his life, Stephen, by the grace of God, presented the gospel to the most difficult segment of Judaism.

The *diaconate* then was a feeder of other orders of ministry in the church. Evangelists, elders, pastors came from the ranks of the deacons. The rather low view of this office in some evangelical churches stifles the full usefulness of the *diaconate*.

Donald J. MacNair, executive of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, shatters this traditional view of deacons when he says,

"One major truth about the service of the deacon comes through this entire study. The original seven were not simply delivery boys. These men were to use their office and the physical resources at their disposal to bring unity back to the local body of believers to do a mighty and spiritual service."⁴

MacNair makes a point of the responsibility of deacons not only to relieve needs but to deal with the underlying causes of those needs. The deacon then must be sensitive, wise, and knowledgeable of scripture to exercise such an important spiritual ministry.

¹ H. W. A. Meyer, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1875, p. 13.

² A. B. Simpson, *The Epistles of Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus*, Christian Publications, Inc., Harrisburg, p. 69.

³ Quote from William Lefroy, *The Christian Ministry*, Funk & Wagnalls, London, 1891, p. 140.

⁴ Donald J. MacNair, *The Growing Local Church*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1975, p. 111.

The Scriptural Qualifications of Deacons

The qualifications of a deacon may be drawn from two passages in the New Testament. The establishment of the ministry of deacons as recorded in Acts chapter six provides a partial list of qualifications for this office.

But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (Acts 6:3)

The deacon, like the elder, must be a man with a good reputation not only in the church but in the community as well. The duties of his office call for the highest level of confidence. As a very important lay leader the deacon should have the trust of the membership.

The apostles agreed that the deacons selected from the fellowship should be Spirit-filled men. Though their ministry was largely the administration of material things, Spirit-filled men were essential for the oversight of this task. The work assigned the deacons was an integral part of the church's overall ministry.

No dichotomy exists between the spiritual and the material ministries of the church. The deacons elected to wait tables in the household of faith are as much in need of the fullness of the Holy Spirit as the elders who minister the Word.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit is just as essential for service as He is for holy living. Christians so often experience futility in their efforts at service in most instances because of the absence of anointing for service. The norm for every Christian is to be Spirit-filled.

The third characteristic of good deacons given by the apostles was wisdom. The deacon was assigned to an important task

requiring him not only to serve himself but to enlist and oversee others in the accomplishment of the task. The deacons were called upon frequently to make decisions and to deal with the problems of people. The deacon must be wise in the sense that he has developed the skill of applying his knowledge in a given situation. He should be a man of good judgment.

As the church grew and spread beyond Palestine to the Gentiles the office of deacon became more important in the life of the church. When Paul instructed Timothy in matters of church order he advised him to have deacons in the churches. Paul's instructions included a guideline of qualifications to assure spiritual leadership in the office of deacon comparable to the standards for the office of elder.

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. . . .

Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:8-10, 12-13)

The similarities as well as the differences of the qualifications of deacons to that of elders are important. Three qualities of a deacon are exactly like the qualities of eldership.

The deacon's home life is very important. He must have a solid marriage that meets scriptural standards. He must also have a well-ordered home. His children should reflect in their conduct the Christian atmosphere of the home. The support of a godly wife is certainly implied in this passage.

With the widespread need to strengthen the family this requisite for leadership should not be taken lightly by any church.

The deacon like the elder is not to be addicted to wine. The collective judgment of our fellowship from its inception until now is that believers should not use any form of alcoholic beverages. Since alcoholism is now the most threatening form

of drug abuse in western society the Christian community must refrain all the more from the use of alcoholic beverages. The deacons and the elders must provide a wholesome example by their own abstinence.

The financial practices of a candidate for the office of deacon ought not to be overlooked. The scriptures say that he is not to "be fond of sordid gain." The word *sordid* infers a shameful or dishonest gain. When one's love for money and material things is so overpowering that he is willing to compromise Christian principles to get money he is not qualified for church leadership. The deacon like the elder should be above reproach in financial matters. He should have a Spirit-given capacity to use his possessions as a stewardship for the glory of Christ. The way a man handles money is the key to his whole value system. An officer of the church who has responsibility for an important share of the finances should have a deep commitment to the values set forth in the gospel. He not only has responsibility to account for the fund, but he must by his own attitude toward money lead the church to the sanctified management of its resources.

Paul speaks not only of the characteristics of deacons that are similar to those of the elders, but he adds some characteristics not found in the list for elders. Paul advises Timothy that men of dignity should be selected for the *diaconate*. The image of the deacon should be one that commands respect. A deacon must deal with all kinds and all ages of people in the course of his duties. As a servant of Christ his bearing should enable him to minister to all.

The idea of dignity is somewhat tarnished in modern culture. So many leaders in high places have failed that cynicism has taken over in the populous. The unfortunate result of this situation is the immortalization of the undignified. The church is obligated to counter such fuzzy thinking and reassert the credibility of dignity. It is needed in the home, in the government, and in the church. Holy Spirit-implanted dignity is a quality of Christian character.

The person selected to serve as a deacon should be in control not only of his walk but also of his talk. In this ministry the deacon will be in constant contact with people in their homes, making him aware of problems that should never be discussed outside one's secret prayer closet. Careless talk damages the

work and the reputation of fellow believers. It is significant that this quality be singled out and emphasized in the instruction for deacons, and that he be encouraged to strictly adhere to this. It is a quality that should be emulated by elders and by every Christian. It is especially important that deacons avoid a double-tongue (1 Tim. 3:8). The Greek word translated *double-tongue* carries the connotation of talebearing. The seriousness of this sin can be more readily understood by comparing Proverbs 11:13 with 1 Timothy 3:8:

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter. (Prov. 11:13)

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain. (1 Tim. 3:8)

The control of the tongue is a necessity to the deacon's ministry of compassion and understanding. Only the trustworthy can visit from house to house and enjoy the high privilege of such direct exposure to the weaknesses and faults of the saints. The deacon, and for that matter any leader, can minister only to those who trust him.

The office of deacon requires not only qualities of Christian character; it also requires a deep knowledge of the things of God. Paul says,

But holding to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. (1 Tim. 3:9)

The mystery of faith speaks of an objective faith, the content of faith. These servants of the church must have more than an ordinary understanding of that body of truth which constitutes the gospel. Deacons should be men who know and love the Word of God. The great doctrines of the Bible are their spiritual sustenance. Deacons are to minister truth with compassion.

This office, like that of the elder, is not for the novice; it requires maturity. Paul instructed Timothy that deacons were to be "tested."

And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. (1 Tim. 3:10)

Paul's use of the present imperative suggests that the testing of the man should be over a period of time. Some have erroneously concluded that deacons should have a probation period after their election to office. Paul is not suggesting a probation; he is calling for care in the selection of the deacons. Only those who have proven themselves should be considered for the office. R. C. H. Lenski, a Lutheran scholar, supports this position by calling attention to the kind of men selected in Acts six for the *diaconate*. They were tried and proven men, selected from the very best to serve as deacons.

The office of deacon should never be used as a ploy to entice some inactive member into ministry. The deacons are to come from those already active in ministry.

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:13)

A distinction must be made in this verse between the technical and non-technical use of the word *deacon*. Paul is saying that those selected for the office of deacon should be men who have already served the church well by their unofficial ministry. Faithful service is the most likely way for a promising leader to come to the attention of his brethren. The New International Version seems a better translation of this verse.

Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:13—NIV)

The practice of translating the participle *oi diakonasantes* as the work of a deacon comes from the Episcopal approach to the office of deacon. They follow Catholic tradition which looked upon the *diaconate* as a step in the ranks of the clergy: Men are first ordained deacons and then priests and then bishops. While it is true both from scripture and tradition that some deacons entered the ministry or became elders the Episcopal system can

hardly be justified either from this scripture or the church's experience.

Paul is here discussing the qualifications of a good deacon. Paul's concern is that the church select men who have already proven themselves in fruitful ministry. The apostle hastens to explain that active laymen are acquiring a good standing and great boldness in their faith. Spiritual growth for them is the by-product of dedicated ministry.

Deaconesses

No consideration of this passage would be complete without a careful interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11:

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

The use of *women* rather than *wives* indicates that among those serving in the church's ministry of compassion were women or deaconesses. While the New Testament does not mention an office of deaconess, this verse along with Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 5:9-10 indicate that women had a definite ministry in the early church.

Four qualifications are given for those women who serve the church as deaconesses. They are essentially the same qualifications as those required of deacons.

Among the women who ministered were the widows. Paul's instructions to Timothy suggest a category of widows enrolled by the church and supported by the church.

Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. (1 Tim. 5:9-10)

The regulations called for women sixty years of age or older

with a record of godly deportment. They no doubt were given opportunities of ministry among the saints such as prayer, teaching younger women, and probably as strength permitted ministry to the sick and suffering. References to their work may be found in writings of the Church Fathers.

H. P. Tiddon, Anglican scholar, suggests that women were admitted to the order of widows on the basis of past active service for Christ. Since advanced age prevented the continuation of that same level of active ministry, the widows gave themselves to devotional ministry rather than the practice of philanthropy.¹

Sixty does not seem to be an advanced age in modern terms, but considering the shorter life expectancy in the first century, a person reaching sixty years of age was considered very elderly. However, at least one ancient source, the Theodosian Code, sets sixty as the age for deaconesses. The council of Chalcedon set forty as the minimum age of a deaconess.²

It cannot be established that the church supported widows from the days of the apostles. They were considered deaconesses, but they did constitute a work force of devoted women essential to the church's total ministry. During the post-Apostolic age the order of widows was gradually absorbed by the order of deaconesses.

Kittle's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* suggests that the instruction given the older women in Titus 2:3-5 may provide some insight into the nature of the ministry carried on by widows.³

Paul says to Titus:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3-5)

These mature, godly women had a responsibility of pastoral care to the young wives of the congregation. The elders and

deacons of the primitive church recognized the role of women in Christian service and provided legitimate outlets of ministry for them.

Phoebe, of Cenchrea, was a business woman who traveled as far as Rome in the course of her activities. In her home church she served as a deaconess and by her faithful ministry won the commendation of the apostle Paul.

The pastoral epistles provide the divine standard for church order. The Holy Spirit gave Paul for the church a basic principal to be followed in selecting leaders and workers. They were all required to be spiritually minded and above reproach in their walk before men.

¹ H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy*. Klock and Klock; Minneapolis, reprint 1978, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, Wm. B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, 1978 edition, pp. 456, 457.

The Ministry of the Lay-Elders

The lay-elder is a member of the local church leadership team, working in a Spirit-directed community. The eldership is not a show room for individualism but an opportunity to coordinate with the whole body the Spirit-imparted gift or gifts of ministry. Lay-elders have a large and diversified range of work. A number of leaders with differing gifts can be involved.

The lay eldership is the pastor-elder's strongest support. They are his immediate helpers in the pastoral task of caring for the church. While the work of elders touches all the ministries of the church the focus of the eldership is upon the spiritual ministries. Every church should have a job description which details the functions assigned the lay-elders. The pastor's input in drafting this document is critical, for he is the supervisor of the elders since their activities relate to his work. The lay-elders, more than any other members in the assembly, assist the pastor or pastors.

Most of the functions of the eldership fall within the circle of pastoral care. The pastor must know that the elders are committed and prepared for the kinds of spiritual duties they are expected to carry out. It is for this reason the scriptural qualifications for lay-elders are as high as those of the pastor-elder. The best overview of pastoral care found in scripture is Paul's address to the Ephesian elders.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
(Acts 20:28)

The writer to the Hebrews particularizes the pastoral role.

The threefold ministry persisted in the church until the Roman hierarchical system modified it. As the Roman Catholic church made the pastor a priest the role of eldership became less significant. In time of multiple eldership in the local church became non-existent. The Protestant reformation saw the restoration of the eldership. Priests became pastors and lay-elders were instituted once again to give supportive leadership with their fellow elder, the pastor.

The Function of the Lay-elder

The management of the spiritual and material needs of any growing church is an extensive responsibility. One man cannot effectively carry out all functions implied in pastoral oversight. The pastor is the coordinator and general overseer of the work, but he must have supportive leaders to rightly carry out his function. To be chosen as a lay-elder is much more than an honor conferred by the congregation upon some faithful member. It is a calling. It is a ministry absolutely essential to the welfare of any local church. The lay-elders help the pastor with the task of oversight and with the shepherding of the flock of God.

As did the ancient elders in Israel so the modern elder will, to the extent of his gifts and assignments, help rule and care for the congregation. Multiple-eldership is a divine plan for expanding the work force of the local church. Only as the workers increase in number can the church grow numerically. Undershepherds working with the pastor-elder make possible a high level of people-centered pastoral care for even the largest church.

In many evangelical churches today the eldership is little more than an honor guard. Modern evangelicals do well to restudy the writings of the reformation on this subject. The newer denominations in particular have been derelict in establishing a truly New Testament church order. The renewal of lay participation in the assembly calls for a fresh consideration of the ancient but relevant ministry of lay elders.

¹ Kittle's Word Studies, Vol 6, pp. 662-680

² Thomas M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*. Klock and Klock Christian Publisher, Minneapolis (1977 reprint), p. 170.

Who Are the Deacons?

The work of a deacon has often been defined as the trusteeship of the material aspects of the church. A broad spectrum of job descriptions are assigned them under this definition. Some churches give to the deacons the responsibility of collecting and distributing the benevolences of the church. Others make them the custodians of the properties of the assembly. Still others see the *diaconate* as accounting for the business and financial matters of the congregation.

Among Baptist churches the deacons are often assigned to the work that other church bodies give to the elders.

None of these systems seem to have a broad enough horizon for the *diaconate* when compared with the New Testament scriptures. It does not appear that they had the oversight of the church since that fell to the elders. However, the work of a deacon went beyond waiting on tables. One of few recorded sermons in the Book of Acts is by Stephen, the deacon, delivered before the highest Jewish executive body. He preached with power and skill. Another deacon driven from his home by persecution was God's instrument for the planting of a great church. The scriptures are careful to record an incident of his ability as a personal soul-winner. Every modern deacon should read Acts 8:26-40 and ask God to use him to win other men to Christ as Philip did.

The Meaning of the Word Deacon

The Greek word for deacon, *diakonos*, means one who serves or ministers. It applied to a household slave who waited on tables. Like many other words in the vernacular of that time the New Testament lifted this word *diakonos* to a much higher meaning. The *diakonos* of the New Testament church was a

minister of compassion officially appointed by the church. He held a place of dignity in the assembly. His ministry was supportive of the pastoral leadership and that of the lay elders.

The Origin of Deaconship

The scriptures have preserved the record of the origin of the *diaconate* or deaconship.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: When they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6—KJV)

The seven deacons chosen by the Jerusalem church were necessary to the welfare and growth of that great church. Deacons were selected to enlarge and to specialize the work force. They were to apply their gifts and wisdom to the social needs of the assembly in order to free the preaching staff from the details involved in such ministry.

Acts not only gives the genesis of the deaconship but also gives some essential insights into the qualities of deacons as well. The manner of selecting and consecrating the deacons in this first church verify the importance of the office.

Some Bible scholars are persuaded that even before the appointment of the seven an order of servants existed in the church which finally emerged as the deaconship. The scripture sighted for this is Acts 5:6. In the account of the remarkable

judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, the young men were summoned to remove the bodies from the place of assembly. *Neoteroi* translated "young" may refer to the first deacon, suggested by the use of this term in Luke 22:26.

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. (Luke 22:24-26—KJV)

Christ was suggesting such a ministry to be a part of the leadership of the church. *Neoteroi* carried such a meaning in Greek usage.

The church in Jerusalem provides an excellent model for the development of the elders and deacons. This new order of ministry was created to meet the leadership needs of that growing congregation. The guidance of the Holy Spirit was sought in the forming of the office and in the selection of men to fill that office.

The Jerusalem church by active and continuous evangelism had won to Christ scores of Hellenistic Jews as well as Aramaic-speaking Jews. The new assembly soon discovered tension developing between these two ethnic groups. The peculiar circumstances under which the church ministered added to the problem. Fanatic persecution from the non-Christian community had left many believers totally destitute. More fortunate members were willing to make great sacrifices of their material wealth so that the needy in the Christian community might be adequately cared for. The pressure of feeding hundreds of people each day produced problems. The apostolic leaders were guided by the Holy Spirit to resolve these problems by adding to the church's work force the *diaconate* or the deacons.

By the end of the apostolic period the office of deacon was well established in the life of the church. It has survived until modern times and is currently reaching a new place of importance in the ministry of the church.

The Cultural Background of the *Diaconate*

The Greek word, *diakonos*, from which we get deacon, means a servant. In the Gentile culture to be a servant was usually to be a slave, a position of inferiority. The only exception to this was when the term occasionally was applied to some form of government service.

The perception of a servant was quite different in Jewish culture. The position of a servant was not considered inferior. In fact to be the servant of a good and great master was thought to be a high honor. The *diaconate* was born in the Jewish churches and probably reflected their understanding of servanthood. As the church grew and crossed cultural lines the *diaconate* survived and increased in importance. The pagan idea of inferiority was not applied to the servants of the church. The deacons of the early church were men of humility but not inferior men. This was an office respected by the church, one extremely important to the well-being of the church.

The Duties of the Office of Deacon

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. (Phil. 1:1)

By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians the office of deacon had become firmly established in the church. Paul and Timothy addressed the believers of that assembly and then the office-bearers of the assembly, the bishops and the deacons. These two offices had the administrative responsibilities and no doubt had been the official channel of correspondence with Paul and Timothy. In behalf of the congregation the bishops and deacons had sent funds for the support of Paul's ministry. Hendrich Meyer, German theologian of the nineteenth century, suggests that Paul addressed the leaders in this special way because of the nature of his letter. It was not only an epistle of teaching but it was a thank you letter for their financial support.¹ This would suggest that early Christians had a very sophisticated system of stewardship. Individuals had given their gifts to the church, which had sent the gifts to Paul through their appro-

priate officers. This would account for the salutation to the church officers only in the letter to the Philippians.

The founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Dr. A. B. Simpson, understood deacons to be significant in the government of the church.

"There was a second class of officers called deacons. The word denotes a minister; that is, one who ministers—a servant to the church. This sufficiently covers the office of deacon as it is usually exercised today in Christian churches, the ministry of hospitality, kindness to the sick, the stranger, and the sufferer, and relief to the poor and needy. These ministries are so important that the office of deacon was the first to be filled by the apostolic church . . ."²

The church during the days of its greatest spiritual power was the most active in ministries of compassion to suffering people. The deacons were responsible for the leadership of this manifestation of love. We are not told in scripture that the *diaconate* of the primitive church ministered to the needy of society in general. The scriptural record relates to the suffering within the church.

But it must be kept in mind that the deacons did more than minister to the poor. The Jerusalem church was under such intense persecution that much of the congregation were suffering poverty. The first seven deacons were set aside to direct the ministry to this needy multitude.

The situation at Philippi was quite different. There is no evidence of poverty there. The congregation was able on more than one occasion to send financial support to the apostle Paul and his missionary team. Yet this church had deacons and they were so prominent as to receive special greetings from Paul. Some scholars have attempted to prove that deacons were elected only in those churches having a problem with poverty. The New Testament data does not support that premise. If deacons were a norm in the churches of that day, their function must have included a larger ministry than was first assigned them in Acts chapter six. While the scriptures provide no examples of the *diaconate* ministering to the physical needs of the non-Christian community this could have been the case in

churches where the believers themselves suffered no poverty. The very spirit of Christian charity seems to call for this kind of ministry. It has occurred in the subsequent history of the church again and again.

The duties of the deacon in the days of the apostles was evidently larger than a ministry of waiting on tables. They ministered to spiritual needs as well as to physical needs.

In the post-apostolic period deacons continued to be an essential office of ministry. Clement of Rome, one of the church fathers, in a reference to the spread of the gospel speaks of the continued importance of deacons in his time. He refers to the apostles,

"having received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and conformed in the Word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe."

The duties of a deacon are further amplified by the ministry of Philip, one of the original seven deacons in Jerusalem. Persecution became so intense that Philip along with most of the leaders of the Christian church had to flee Jerusalem for their lives. Philip went north to Samaria and began to preach the gospel.

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

And there was much rejoicing in that city. (Acts 8:4-8)

The ministry of Philip in this rather alien community produced a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Apparently Philip did not engage in the usual work of deacons, but seeing the spiritual condition of the city he gave himself to preaching Christ. There was such obvious anointing of the Holy Spirit on his preaching that great crowds of people came to hear Philip. He was also used of God to heal the sick and to exorcise demons.

The effect of deacon Philip's preaching was the gathering of a sizable congregation of believers. The church in Jerusalem, hearing of the working of God in Samaria, delegated Peter and John to perfect the faith and order of this new church.

The ministry of Philip not only included successful church planting but he excelled as well in personal evangelism.

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open his mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who shall relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth."

And the eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?"

And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:26-40)

Philip, a Spirit-filled man, could sense the leading of the Holy Spirit in his life. The directive to go to the desert was obeyed without hesitation, and there, by divine appointment, Philip met the Ethiopian. What better situation for personal evangelism, a prepared witness and a seeking soul brought together. Personal soul winning after this pattern should be the experience of all church officers and especially the deacons.

Philip so developed his gifts that he became an evangelist. Scripture does not indicate that he gave up the office of deacon, but since the ministry of an evangelist is to the churches at large and the ministry of the deacon to the local assembly, it can be assumed that he accepted the responsibility of the larger office of evangelist.

Stephen enjoyed a leadership role far beyond the management of food distribution among the needy. His spiritual gifts and testimony for Christ brought him into the public eye. So threatening was the spiritual power of this man that the enemies of Christianity had him put to death. The church should remember that the first martyr of the new age was a deacon. This speaks well of the spirituality and significance of that office.

The ability of Stephen to carry on dialogue with the non-

Christian leadership in the community was critical. So skillful were his arguments on the behalf of the gospel of Christ they could not be refuted. Stephen was an able defender of the faith. Though he paid with his life, Stephen, by the grace of God, presented the gospel to the most difficult segment of Judaism.

The *diaconate* then was a feeder of other orders of ministry in the church. Evangelists, elders, pastors came from the ranks of the deacons. The rather low view of this office in some evangelical churches stifles the full usefulness of the *diaconate*.

Donald J. MacNair, executive of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, shatters this traditional view of deacons when he says,

"One major truth about the service of the deacon comes through this entire study. The original seven were not simply delivery boys. These men were to use their office and the physical resources at their disposal to bring unity back to the local body of believers to do a mighty and spiritual service."⁴

MacNair makes a point of the responsibility of deacons not only to relieve needs but to deal with the underlying causes of those needs. The deacon then must be sensitive, wise, and knowledgeable of scripture to exercise such an important spiritual ministry.

¹ H. W. A. Meyer, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1875, p. 13.

² A. B. Simpson, *The Epistles of Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus*, Christian Publications, Inc., Harrisburg, p. 69.

³ Quote from William Lefroy, *The Christian Ministry*, Funk & Wagnalls, London, 1891, p. 140.

⁴ Donald J. MacNair, *The Growing Local Church*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1975, p. 111.

The Scriptural Qualifications of Deacons

The qualifications of a deacon may be drawn from two passages in the New Testament. The establishment of the ministry of deacons as recorded in Acts chapter six provides a partial list of qualifications for this office.

But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (Acts 6:3)

The deacon, like the elder, must be a man with a good reputation not only in the church but in the community as well. The duties of his office call for the highest level of confidence. As a very important lay leader the deacon should have the trust of the membership.

The apostles agreed that the deacons selected from the fellowship should be Spirit-filled men. Though their ministry was largely the administration of material things, Spirit-filled men were essential for the oversight of this task. The work assigned the deacons was an integral part of the church's overall ministry.

No dichotomy exists between the spiritual and the material ministries of the church. The deacons elected to wait tables in the household of faith are as much in need of the fulness of the Holy Spirit as the elders who minister the Word.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit is just as essential for service as He is for holy living. Christians so often experience futility in their efforts at service in most instances because of the absence of anointing for service. The norm for every Christian is to be Spirit-filled.

The third characteristic of good deacons given by the apostles was wisdom. The deacon was assigned to an important task

requiring him not only to serve himself but to enlist and oversee others in the accomplishment of the task. The deacons were called upon frequently to make decisions and to deal with the problems of people. The deacon must be wise in the sense that he has developed the skill of applying his knowledge in a given situation. He should be a man of good judgment.

As the church grew and spread beyond Palestine to the Gentiles the office of deacon became more important in the life of the church. When Paul instructed Timothy in matters of church order he advised him to have deacons in the churches. Paul's instructions included a guideline of qualifications to assure spiritual leadership in the office of deacon comparable to the standards for the office of elder.

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. . . .

Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:8-10, 12-13)

The similarities as well as the differences of the qualifications of deacons to that of elders are important. Three qualities of a deacon are exactly like the qualities of eldership.

The deacon's home life is very important. He must have a solid marriage that meets scriptural standards. He must also have a well-ordered home. His children should reflect in their conduct the Christian atmosphere of the home. The support of a godly wife is certainly implied in this passage.

With the widespread need to strengthen the family this requisite for leadership should not be taken lightly by any church.

The deacon like the elder is not to be addicted to wine. The collective judgment of our fellowship from its inception until now is that believers should not use any form of alcoholic beverages. Since alcoholism is now the most threatening form

of drug abuse in western society the Christian community must refrain all the more from the use of alcoholic beverages. The deacons and the elders must provide a wholesome example by their own abstinence.

The financial practices of a candidate for the office of deacon ought not to be overlooked. The scriptures say that he is not to "be fond of sordid gain." The word *sordid* infers a shameful or dishonest gain. When one's love for money and material things is so overpowering that he is willing to compromise Christian principles to get money he is not qualified for church leadership. The deacon like the elder should be above reproach in financial matters. He should have a Spirit-given capacity to use his possessions as a stewardship for the glory of Christ. The way a man handles money is the key to his whole value system. An officer of the church who has responsibility for an important share of the finances should have a deep commitment to the values set forth in the gospel. He not only has responsibility to account for the fund, but he must by his own attitude toward money lead the church to the sanctified management of its resources.

Paul speaks not only of the characteristics of deacons that are similar to those of the elders, but he adds some characteristics not found in the list for elders. Paul advises Timothy that men of dignity should be selected for the *diaconate*. The image of the deacon should be one that commands respect. A deacon must deal with all kinds and all ages of people in the course of his duties. As a servant of Christ his bearing should enable him to minister to all.

The idea of dignity is somewhat tarnished in modern culture. So many leaders in high places have failed that cynicism has taken over in the populous. The unfortunate result of this situation is the immortalization of the undignified. The church is obligated to counter such fuzzy thinking and reassert the credibility of dignity. It is needed in the home, in the government, and in the church. Holy Spirit-implanted dignity is a quality of Christian character.

The person selected to serve as a deacon should be in control not only of his walk but also of his talk. In this ministry the deacon will be in constant contact with people in their homes, making him aware of problems that should never be discussed outside one's secret prayer closet. Careless talk damages the

work and the reputation of fellow believers. It is significant that this quality be singled out and emphasized in the instruction for deacons, and that he be encouraged to strictly adhere to this. It is a quality that should be emulated by elders and by every Christian. It is especially important that deacons avoid a double-tongue (1 Tim. 3:8). The Greek word translated *double-tongue* carries the connotation of talebearing. The seriousness of this sin can be more readily understood by comparing Proverbs 11:13 with 1 Timothy 3:8:

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter. (Prov. 11:13)

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain. (1 Tim. 3:8)

The control of the tongue is a necessity to the deacon's ministry of compassion and understanding. Only the trustworthy can visit from house to house and enjoy the high privilege of such direct exposure to the weaknesses and faults of the saints. The deacon, and for that matter any leader, can minister only to those who trust him.

The office of deacon requires not only qualities of Christian character; it also requires a deep knowledge of the things of God. Paul says,

But holding to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. (1 Tim. 3:9)

The mystery of faith speaks of an objective faith, the content of faith. These servants of the church must have more than an ordinary understanding of that body of truth which constitutes the gospel. Deacons should be men who know and love the Word of God. The great doctrines of the Bible are their spiritual sustenance. Deacons are to minister truth with compassion.

This office, like that of the elder, is not for the novice; it requires maturity. Paul instructed Timothy that deacons were to be "tested."

And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. (1 Tim. 3:10)

Paul's use of the present imperative suggests that the testing of the man should be over a period of time. Some have erroneously concluded that deacons should have a probation period after their election to office. Paul is not suggesting a probation; he is calling for care in the selection of the deacons. Only those who have proven themselves should be considered for the office. R. C. H. Lenski, a Lutheran scholar, supports this position by calling attention to the kind of men selected in Acts six for the *diaconate*. They were tried and proven men, selected from the very best to serve as deacons.

The office of deacon should never be used as a ploy to entice some inactive member into ministry. The deacons are to come from those already active in ministry.

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:13)

A distinction must be made in this verse between the technical and non-technical use of the word *deacon*. Paul is saying that those selected for the office of deacon should be men who have already served the church well by their unofficial ministry. Faithful service is the most likely way for a promising leader to come to the attention of his brethren. The New International Version seems a better translation of this verse.

Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:13—NIV)

The practice of translating the participle *oi diakonasantes* as the work of a deacon comes from the Episcopal approach to the office of deacon. They follow Catholic tradition which looked upon the *diaconate* as a step in the ranks of the clergy: Men are first ordained deacons and then priests and then bishops. While it is true both from scripture and tradition that some deacons entered the ministry or became elders the Episcopal system can

hardly be justified either from this scripture or the church's experience.

Paul is here discussing the qualifications of a good deacon. Paul's concern is that the church select men who have already proven themselves in fruitful ministry. The apostle hastens to explain that active laymen are acquiring a good standing and great boldness in their faith. Spiritual growth for them is the by-product of dedicated ministry.

Deaconesses

No consideration of this passage would be complete without a careful interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11:

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

The use of *women* rather than *wives* indicates that among those serving in the church's ministry of compassion were women or deaconesses. While the New Testament does not mention an office of deaconess, this verse along with Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 5:9-10 indicate that women had a definite ministry in the early church.

Four qualifications are given for those women who serve the church as deaconesses. They are essentially the same qualifications as those required of deacons.

Among the women who ministered were the widows. Paul's instructions to Timothy suggest a category of widows enrolled by the church and supported by the church.

Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man,

having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work.
(1 Tim. 5:9-10)

The regulations called for women sixty years of age or older

with a record of godly deportment. They no doubt were given opportunities of ministry among the saints such as prayer, teaching younger women, and probably as strength permitted ministry to the sick and suffering. References to their work may be found in writings of the Church Fathers.

H. P. Tiddon, Anglican scholar, suggests that women were admitted to the order of widows on the basis of past active service for Christ. Since advanced age prevented the continuation of that same level of active ministry, the widows gave themselves to devotional ministry rather than the practice of philanthropy.¹

Sixty does not seem to be an advanced age in modern terms, but considering the shorter life expectancy in the first century, a person reaching sixty years of age was considered very elderly. However, at least one ancient source, the Theodosian Code, sets sixty as the age for deaconesses. The council of Chalcedon set forty as the minimum age of a deaconess.²

It cannot be established that the church supported widows from the days of the apostles. They were considered deaconesses, but they did constitute a work force of devoted women essential to the church's total ministry. During the post-Apostolic age the order of widows was gradually absorbed by the order of deaconesses.

Kittle's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* suggests that the instruction given the older women in Titus 2:3-5 may provide some insight into the nature of the ministry carried on by widows.³

Paul says to Titus:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good,

that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,

to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3-5)

These mature, godly women had a responsibility of pastoral care to the young wives of the congregation. The elders and

deacons of the primitive church recognized the role of women in Christian service and provided legitimate outlets of ministry for them.

Phoebe, of Cenchrea, was a business woman who traveled as far as Rome in the course of her activities. In her home church she served as a deaconess and by her faithful ministry won the commendation of the apostle Paul.

The pastoral epistles provide the divine standard for church order. The Holy Spirit gave Paul for the church a basic principal to be followed in selecting leaders and workers. They were all required to be spiritually minded and above reproach in their walk before men.

¹ H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy*. Klock and Klock: Minneapolis, reprint 1978, p. 56.

² Ibid., p. 56.

³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IX, Wm. B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, 1978 edition, pp. 456, 457.

The Ministry of the Lay-Elders

The lay-elder is a member of the local church leadership team, working in a Spirit-directed community. The eldership is not a show room for individualism but an opportunity to coordinate with the whole body the Spirit-imparted gift or gifts of ministry. Lay-elders have a large and diversified range of work. A number of leaders with differing gifts can be involved.

The lay eldership is the pastor-elder's strongest support. They are his immediate helpers in the pastoral task of caring for the church. While the work of elders touches all the ministries of the church, Every church should have a job description which details the functions assigned the lay-elders. The pastor's input in drafting this document is critical, for he is the supervisor of the elders since their activities relate to his work. The lay-elders, more than any other members in the assembly, assist the pastor or pastors.

Most of the functions of the eldership fall within the circle of pastoral care. The pastor must know that the elders are committed and prepared for the kinds of spiritual duties they are expected to carry out. It is for this reason the scriptural qualifications for lay-elders are as high as those of the pastor-elder. The best overview of pastoral care found in scripture is Paul's address to the Ephesian elders.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

The writer to the Hebrews particularizes the pastoral role.

may be disturbed. He may feel burdened if he does not speak, but his brethren will have to take his burden back home with them if he does speak. If one person speaks out of order, the whole assembly suffers. Let me state emphatically: the Holy Spirit should not be offended in the meeting. If He is offended, the spiritual blessing will be lost. When we are concerned with others' needs and others' edification, then the Holy Spirit is honored and He will do the work of edification both in us and in others.

Be a humble soul from the very start. If anyone is uncertain whether his speaking edifies or not, it is best for him to consult with the responsible brothers, to ask them, "Brothers, do you think I should speak more or speak less in the meetings?" Be humble and do not think too highly of yourself, as if you were the marvel of these twenty centuries—the best singer and the best preacher! Let us learn humility that our gatherings may be strong. Whenever people walk into our midst, they should instantly sense the presence of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. It will cause them to fall down on their faces and worship God, declaring that God is indeed among us.

JP

LESSON SEVENTEEN

VARIOUS MEETINGS

In the previous lesson we stated the principle of meeting together; now we will turn to its practice. From what I personally can see, there are five different types of meetings in the Bible. They are gospel meetings, breaking of bread meetings, prayer meetings, exercise of gifts or fellowship meetings, and ministry or preaching meetings. We can find examples of all these in the Bible. Thus we know that at the time of the apostles in the New Testament days, there were at least these five different types of meetings. The church today also needs to have all these various meetings if it is to be strong before God. We must learn how to meet in order to help brothers and sisters grow in the Lord.

Gospel Meetings

The most important meeting in the New Testament is the gospel meeting. It is the first type of meeting in the book of Acts as well as in the Gospels. Judging from the

history of the early church, gospel meetings were the most basic of all the church meetings.

It was not till after the church began to degenerate during the third and fourth centuries that gospel meetings gradually lost their prominence and ministry meetings took on the leading role. The popularity of listening to sermons is a reflection on the weakened condition of the church. In the early church, preaching the gospel rather than listening to sermons occupied the foremost place. Today's reverse situation is a proof of the failure of the church. To have a strong church, the preaching of the gospel should be restored to its original position of being the most basic of all the meetings.

Brothers and sisters everywhere need to receive light from God and not imitate the ways of traditional Christianity. Christianity generally emphasizes sermons; we have unconsciously followed that practice. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we may be recovered to the original state of the church.

The Lord has put the church on the earth not only for the purpose of building herself up but also for the sake of gathering in souls to be material for the church. The gift of evangelist does not head the list so far as the inward up-building of the church is concerned, but when the gospel was preached in Acts, evangelism was the first gift to be exercised. Philip's evangelization of Samaria in Acts 8 is a clear evidence of this. During the time of the expansion of the church of God, the gift of evangelist occupied the first and foremost place. Let us therefore correct the custom of traditional Christianity which makes listening to sermons the center of all gatherings; let us put gospel meetings back again in their proper place.

As soon as people come to believe in the Lord, they should immediately start to help in the preaching of the gospel. Do not allow them to develop the habit of listening to sermons; instead, help them to cultivate the habit of serving by preaching the gospel.

There should be at least one gospel meeting every week. Set aside the best time for this meeting, either the Lord's day morning or the Lord's day afternoon. Arrange for two or three young believers who are somewhat more advanced and gifted to give their testimonies or to preach the gospel. The older ones either can help these younger ones or, upon occasion, preach themselves. Do, however, give the young ones opportunity. There should be no more than three giving testimonies or preaching the gospel lest the meeting become confusing. The best is to have three persons.

1. COME TO COOPERATE

New believers attending the gospel meetings should realize that the message is not for them but for the unbelievers. Therefore, no believer should come with a critical or indifferent or uncooperative attitude. Do not judge in your hearts whether the gospel is preached well or not. Remember, God has not arranged the meeting for you to hear the gospel. Your attitude should be that of desiring that souls may be saved. You come to cooperate, not to criticize.

2. COME AS THE BODY

Encourage all the brothers and sisters to attend the gospel meetings. Never let any brothers and sisters think they do not need to attend because they are already saved.

True, you are saved, but in the gospel meetings you have work to do. Do not come passively, but rather come in order to work. Let no one be careless about the gospel meetings. The question does not lie in whether or not you know the gospel. Indeed, you should know the substance of every meeting. But you come to the gospel meetings so that you can help, thus having a part in it yourself.

3. BRING A FRIEND

One thing we must certainly do is bring people to the gospel meetings. Before the meeting time, we should invite our friends and relatives. We should extend our invitation to them several days in advance. We should not come to the gospel meeting alone but should at least have one person with us. Do not bring more than four with you, for if you bring too many you will not be able to take care of them. Should it be, though, that God gives you grace to bring in ten, twenty, thirty people, what should you do? You should ask for help from other brothers and sisters. However, do not bring in more unbelievers than you can handle.

It is clear, then, that when you attend gospel meetings, you do not just arrive on time. Those who attend the meetings must prepare beforehand by inviting friends. As the time for the meeting draws close, you should bring your friend in or, as Luke says: Go out into the streets and lanes of the city, yes, even to the highways and byways, and compel the people to come in (See Lk. 14:21-23). You do have a responsibility in the preaching of the gospel. You should at least bring in another soul. How can a gospel meeting be held if only believers attend? Make all the arrangements in advance. Tell the people whom you have

invited where you will meet them. It is absolutely necessary that you bring people in.

4. TAKE CARE OF THE FRIEND

There are several things we should do during the meeting to take care of the friends whom we bring.

SIT NEXT TO THE FRIENDS

When an unbeliever comes to the meeting, he has no idea where to sit. It depends entirely upon you. If there are ushers in the meeting, you should ask them where you should seat your friend. You should follow their directions. If you bring in one person, sit next to him; if two people, sit in the middle; if four, put two on each side of you. Do not try to take care of more than four, for this will be an impossibility. If you have more than four to bring, you should prearrange to have some other brothers and sisters take care of them. Seating is quite important in a gospel meeting. Do not fill the hall with unbelievers. Let the believers and the unbelievers sit next to each other.

HELP FIND BIBLE VERSES AND EXPLAIN TERMINOLOGY

After you have been seated, you have quite a few things to do. You should help unbelievers find the Bible verses given by the preacher. Suppose the preacher speaks on Joshua; you must find the place in the Bible for your friend, for he does not know where Joshua is. If the preacher uses a special term without explaining it, then you should softly whisper to your friend the meaning of the term. If he seems puzzled by names of persons and places, you can tell him that these are Bible names. You need to supplement whatever lack there is in the preaching. Do

not speak too loudly, but whisper clearly enough to make him understand. Mr. Paget Wilkes mentioned an incident in one of his books. Once a preacher from England went to Japan to preach the gospel. Many came to hear him. His first sentence was: "You know the story of the exodus of the people of Israel out of Egypt." Mr. Wilkes immediately went to him and said, "These people know nothing of the Israelites nor of Egypt." Such a move was very wise for it would have taken at least an hour to explain who the Israelites were, what Egypt was, and how the Israelites came out of Egypt. The preacher did not know that these people were so ignorant. However, had he continued without an explanation, then those near the unbelievers could simply have whispered, "The Israelites were Jews, Egypt was a nation, and the Israelites were freed from slavery when they came out of Egypt."

FIND THE HYMNS

You should also help the unbelievers to find the hymns. Instruct them especially when a chorus is sung. If you have four friends with you, it will be all you can do to take care of them in this matter.

OBSERVE REACTIONS AND PRAY

Observe carefully the reaction of the unbelievers as they listen. If their reaction is negative, pray that the Lord will soften their hearts. If you feel a particular person is proud, ask the Lord to break down his pride. Whether the church preaches the gospel well or not depends on how the gospel meeting is conducted. Unless the whole body is mobilized and all the brothers and sisters are involved, there is no

way to preach the gospel. You are the one who knows those whom you have brought in. It is you who should observe them and pray: "Lord, move his heart. Lord, give him understanding. Lord, break down his pride that he may hear." Sometimes you may feel it would be good if the one preaching would say certain words. If so, you may pray thus: "Lord, for the sake of a particular need, make the preacher say those words." Often you will find that the preacher comes out with just those words. Thus, through prayer, you take care of your friends.

HELP THE FRIENDS TO ACCEPT THE LORD

The most important part is to help your friend accept the Lord once you find he is evidently moved. Send the word of the Lord into his heart through prayer. Ask the Lord to make him hear, to let His word sink into his heart, and to enlighten him with the word.

When the preacher is ready to draw in the net, you should encourage your friend by saying, "You too are a sinner. I hope you will accept the Lord." If you notice he is wavering between two opinions, give him a push in the right direction. Do not allow Satan to set up an obstacle or to pull him away. You should work as soon as you perceive that he is somewhat moved. Say to him, "Believe and accept the Lord now. Refusal may mean eternal suffering." When you talk to him, your manner should be serious and sober, lest through frivolity and jesting you lose your effectiveness. When the preacher urges people to accept the Lord, you should help. It is a disgrace if we do not take care of the people for whose salvation we are working while at the same time Satan is diligently working for their

perdition. As Satan carefully guards his possessions, so should we attentively watch over those under our care. We must help them to be saved.

Remember a basic principle: save a person by all possible means. D. L. Moody once said that if we wrongly lead a person to the Lord, God will forgive us. Let our eyes be open. Whether by pushing or by pulling, let us bring people to the Lord. Let us not rest until they are saved.

HELP THEM TO SIGN THEIR NAMES

During the closing of the meeting, help them to sign their names. Some people may be afraid to write down their names, asking why they should do so. You can explain to them that it is for the purpose of visitation.

HELP THEM TO PRAY

Your work is not yet finished. Finally, at the time of prayer, you should help them to pray with you or with another brother or sister. You must not leave anything undone.

VISIT THEM WITH ANOTHER CHRISTIAN

When the church sends people to visit those who have signed their names, you should go with them to visit those whom you have contacted. You may have to go not just once, but two or three times until that soul is saved.

In conclusion, gospel meetings should be the first of all the meetings. The whole body of brothers and sisters must understand its significance and participate in the work. This is how the church will grow and become stronger. May God do the work of recovery in our midst. May the gospel meetings be the first of all the meetings as they were

in the New Testament. In this meeting, every brother and sister must actively work; no one should be lax. Let me tell you, if you get all the new believers to start working for the Lord during the first year of their regeneration, you will make it impossible for them to just sit and listen passively to sermons afterward. If you do this, then the church will truly be in a good condition. The gospel meetings will become a workshop for all the brothers and sisters. Whether a person can preach is not the question; the task is for us to save souls. If we all understand what the gospel meeting is, then there will also always be the need for pulpit ministry. That, however, is not the aim; nowhere in the New Testament does God wish us to aim for that. It is the practice of today's Christianity, but not the practice in the Bible.

Breaking of Bread Meetings

The next important meeting is that of the breaking of bread.

I. THE TABLE AND THE SUPPER

According to the Word of God, the meeting for the breaking of bread has two different aspects: one is the Lord's table and the other is the Lord's supper. 1 Corinthians 10 refers to the Lord's table while 1 Corinthians 11 points to the Lord's supper. However, we would like to consider them in reverse order, starting with 1 Corinthians 11. In the Lord's supper, the bread is the Lord's body, alluding to the physical body of the Lord. By partaking of this body which is given for the remission of our sins, we may thus receive life. So the basic thought of the Lord's supper is to remember the Lord. The meaning of the

Lord's supper lies in remembering how the Lord shed His blood in order that our sins might be forgiven.

But 1 Corinthians 10 takes up another aspect. The breaking of bread is called the Lord's table. "Seeing that we, who are many, are one bread" (v. 17). The bread in 1 Corinthians 11 is the physical body of the Lord but in 1 Corinthians 10 it is us. We who are many are one bread. In other words, the Lord's table emphasizes the communion or fellowship of God's children. Chapter 11 stresses remembering the Lord, while chapter 10 stresses the fellowship of the children of God.

Hence, we have two meanings: one is direct, our focus turned heavenward, remembering the Lord; the other focuses on having fellowship with one another, the one bread on the table. We all have part in this bread; we are all people of this one bread. You belong to this bread; so do I. You have accepted the Savior; so have I. Therefore we ought to have fellowship in the Lord. At the breaking of bread, we come before the Lord both to have fellowship with Him and with all His children.

2. TWO SECTIONS—THE LORD'S AND THE FATHER'S

There is something else to be noticed: the meeting for the breaking of bread is divided into two sections. Let us explain.

Since salvation is composed of two aspects, the breaking of bread meeting naturally follows suit. The first aspect of salvation is that I see myself as a sinner condemned to die, but, through the mercy of the Lord who came to the world and died for me, I have my sins forgiven by accepting the blood of the Lord Jesus. Salvation does not stop at this point, though. After being saved and belonging to the

Lord, I am brought by the Lord Jesus to God whom He calls His Father and my Father. The Holy Spirit who dwells in me causes me to call God, "Abba, Father." This is the second aspect of salvation. In other words, salvation consists of two aspects: the first is the Lord's, and the second is the Father's. The first aspect pertains to forgiveness while the second aspect pertains to acceptance. These two aspects should not be confused in salvation. First I receive forgiveness; then I am accepted before God. As a sinner, I must be connected to the Lord before I can be related to God.

Hence the Bible tells us, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Salvation has both the Son's side, the Lord's aspect, and the Father's side, God's aspect. No one can bypass the Son and come to the Father. He must first come to the Son, to the cross, in order to receive forgiveness, for the just has died for the unjust. Then the Son will lead him to the Father. So, it is first forgiveness and afterwards acceptance. We need to be very clear on this point.

Due to these two aspects of salvation, the meeting for the breaking of bread as a remembrance of salvation naturally falls into two sections. Before the breaking of the bread is the section for the Son; after the bread is broken it becomes the section for the Father. The first portion is the Lord's; the second portion is God's.

FIRST COME TO THE LORD

As we come first to the Lord, we realize what great sinners we are, how we are children of rebellion and of wrath, under the judgment of God without any means of saving

ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

ourselves. But, thank God, through the Lord Jesus who shed His blood for the remission of our sins, we may come to Him today to receive His life. So in the first section, all our prayers and hymns and praises should be directed to the Lord. We as sinners first draw nigh to the Lord to have our sins forgiven.

If we go to the temple, the first thing we meet is the altar, not the ark. Later on, we reach the ark, but first we arrive at the altar. Since the altar is a type of the cross, we first of all approach the Lord with thanksgiving and praise.

In the presence of the Lord, we offer our thanks and praise. Indeed, we can do nothing else but thank and praise Him, for before the blood there is no need to ask for anything. It is inappropriate to ask for things at this meeting. We cannot ask the Lord to shed His blood for us; He has already done that. So we need not ask. All we can do is to thank and praise Him. Whether it is in the form of prayer or in the form of a hymn, nonetheless it is thanks and praise. In thanksgiving, we notice the Lord's work; in praising we consider the Lord Himself. We thank Him for what He has done; and we praise Him for what He is.

In the beginning there may be more thanks; gradually, though, thanks will give way to praise. We thank and we praise. What a wonderful work He has done for us, and what a wonderful Savior He is in His person and position. When our thanks and praises reach a peak, the time to break the bread has arrived. The whole assembly is now brought to the Lord.

THEN THE FATHER ACCEPTS US

After the bread is broken, the second section of the meeting begins. The Lord does not desire that we come to

VARIOUS MEETINGS

Him and stop there. He wants us to go on to the Father. Is it not wonderful that it is we who accept the Lord, but it is the Father who accepts us? We must be clear on this point. According to the truth of the gospel, we accept the Lord, not the Father. Nowhere in the Bible are we exhorted to receive the Father, for it is always the Son on whom we are called to believe. The Father receives us *after* we have become acceptable in His Son. Our accepting the Son is but half of salvation; the Father's accepting us is the other half. Consequently, after the bread is broken, we should come to the Father. We should begin to praise God the Father.

On the morning of His resurrection, the Lord told Mary, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (John 20:17b). Before His resurrection, He always said, "My Father," but after His death and resurrection, His Father became our Father also. So in the second section of the meeting for the breaking of bread, the Lord leads us to the Father. Brothers and sisters, He who leads us in the meeting is the Holy Spirit, and the leading of the Holy Spirit is not contradictory to the principle of salvation. The Holy Spirit will lead us first to the Son and then to the Father. Let us learn to follow His leading and go to the Father after having broken the bread.

Of the three parables recorded in Luke 15, we meet the shepherd in the first and the Father in the last. First the good shepherd, then the good Father. The good shepherd comes out to seek us, but the good Father waits at home for us to find Him. The good shepherd leaves home, but the good Father stays at home to receive us. In the first part of the worship meeting, we meet the good shepherd; so afterwards we come to approach the Father. For this

reason, all the hymns and prayers in the second part are centered on the Father. We do not follow our own dictates but are so led by the Holy Spirit. I believe if the Holy Spirit has His free way with us, He will undoubtedly lead us in this manner.

THE SON LEADS MANY SONS IN PRAISE

In Hebrews 2 we notice a marvelous thing: the Lord Jesus brings many sons into glory. The Lord Jesus as the first-born Son leads many sons into glory. While He was on earth, He was God's only begotten Son, because He was the only Son God had. But after His death and resurrection, He transformed us into many sons. We do not become sons until after we have met the Lord Jesus. Thus it is that in the second part of the breaking of bread, the meeting takes up the character of the first-born Son leading many sons. "In the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise" (Heb. 2:12b). This is the time when the first-born Son leads many sons in praise of the Father. How precious it is that not only the many sons may come to the Father but that it is the first-born who leads the many sons to the Father to praise His holy name. Let us learn to rise up high in our spirit.

The throne of God is established on praises. When the church of God starts to praise, she begins to touch the throne. The more we learn to praise, the more we know the throne.

The type of meeting in Hebrews 2 is the best of all meetings. May we begin to learn a little today. One day in heaven we shall meet in a perfect manner. Nevertheless, let us begin to practice what is meant by being led of the first-born Son to sing praise to the Father in the congrega-

tion in these days before we enter into glory. Let me tell you, this is the ultimate of all the church meetings. It is really glorious.

Prayer Meetings

The prayer meeting is also an important meeting. Each kind of meeting has its own particular characteristic. The testimony which God intends us to maintain on earth is to be fulfilled jointly by preaching the gospel, breaking bread, and praying together. Prayer meetings can be both difficult and easy. New believers need to learn about this kind of meeting.

1. WITH ONE ACCORD

A fundamental requirement for brothers and sisters praying together is to be of one accord. The Lord tells us in Matthew 18 that we must agree on earth. Before and on the day of Pentecost, the one hundred and twenty believers prayed with one accord (Acts 4:1-2). Therefore, the first condition of a prayer meeting is to be of one heart and one mind. How can people gather for prayer if each one has his own mind? The word "agree" in Matthew is most weighty. The Lord promises that, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them. . . ." (v. 19). This particular word in Greek is used in music to denote harmony. If a person is playing alone, there is no problem. But if three play together, one the piano, one the violin, and one the flute, should one of them play out of tune, the result is discord. Likewise our prayers should not be out of harmony. If we are able to agree with one another, God will hear what-

ever we ask. What we bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what we loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. The basic condition is harmony. Therefore let us learn to be harmonious and not to pray each according to his own wish.

2. WITH SPECIFIC REQUESTS

How can we achieve this goal of harmony? I observe that the greatest problem in many prayer meetings lies in too many requests. As long as there are too many subjects for which to pray, it is very difficult to arrive at harmony. We ourselves create disunity by having fifty or sixty prayer items. It becomes an all-inclusive meeting. We do not find such a situation in the Bible. What we do find there is praying for a specific matter. For example, the church prayed for Peter while he was in prison. We too should not pray for many things, but pray rather for one specific matter. It is easy to achieve agreement when there is only one topic. Too many items will make our prayers like a routine.

I believe the prayer meetings in many places require a drastic change. Let each prayer meeting be for just one thing. Perhaps we should pray for the unemployed brothers and sisters or for the sick or for the poor - one of these and nothing else. With one subject we can readily agree.

If there is yet time after we have finished praying for one matter, then we may mention another matter for prayer. We must do the work of prayer before God. The prayer meeting may be divided into two parts, in each part praying for one thing. To pray for two things at the same time makes it difficult for people to be of one accord. Do not therefore carelessly announce two items for prayer

at the commencement. Let the responsible brother announce one thing at a time. I think the greatest need in a prayer meeting is to make the requests simple. The aim of prayer is to accomplish things, to get things done. It is not for social reasons or to please people; thus it cannot include everything.

The power of the specific prayer uttered in Acts 1 and 2 produced Pentecost. As the cross was the work accomplished by the Son of God, so Pentecost was the work accomplished through the prayer of God's children. How was it done? By praying with one accord. Let us, too, pray in that concentrated, not scattered, manner.

Everyone who attends a prayer meeting should come with the preparation of faith. If possible, the brothers and sisters should be told beforehand of the prayer request so that they may have a burden for it. First the sensing of the need, then the burden, and finally the asking.

3. IN REALITY

There is another basic need for the prayers at a prayer meeting, and that is, reality, or genuineness. According to my personal observation (I dare not exaggerate), I have reason to judge that one half of all the words uttered in a prayer meeting are false. The motive of many prayers is not that God may hear, but that man may approve. Whether God answers my prayer is not so important as long as it pleases men. As a consequence, prayers at the prayer meeting become pretentious and empty.

True prayer comes from the desire of the heart, not from the imagination of the mind. It expresses the feeling of the heart, so it arises from a deep longing within. For this reason prayer in the Old Testament was offered to God as in-

cense. All Old Testament incense was made from trees. After the bark was cut, the tree oozed a kind of resin from which incense was manufactured. Hence prayer is not offering anything that might be at hand; it is the presenting of something dug out of the innermost heart. It resembles something that oozes out of wounds. Such prayers are quite different from the easygoing ones that many offer—prayers good to listen to but very ordinary in content. Let us remember well that our prayers are for God to hear, not for pleasing the ears of brothers and sisters.

If the prayers of the prayer meetings lack reality, we frankly cannot expect the church to be strong. For the church to be strong, the prayer meetings must be strong. For the prayer meetings to be strong, all the prayers must be real. We cannot afford to let them be false, for God will never reward falsehood.

Prayer is not preaching, nor is it lecturing. It is asking before God. Therefore, do not use many words as if God were ignorant of the situation and in need of your detailed intelligence reports and arguments!

We pray because we have need; we pray because we have weakness. We come to receive spiritual supply and power. According to our sense of the measure of our need, to that extent do we pray in reality. If we sense no need, our prayer is bound to be unreal.

One of the fundamental causes of feigned prayer is that the one who prays simply cannot forget the other people present. Being always conscious of people, he easily becomes insincere in his prayer. Hence in a prayer meeting, he should remember that though on the one hand his prayer does represent the whole assembly, yet on the other hand he is alone with God, asking truly according to need.

The more definite the need, the more certain the prayer. You may remember the parable used by the Lord Jesus: a friend unexpectedly arrives and you have nothing to serve him. So you go to another friend to ask for bread. The need is very definite. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," says the Lord Jesus (Matt. 7:7). You dare not be careless when there is a real need. The Lord promises that if you ask, you shall have it.

4. WITH CONCISENESS

Prayer needs to be concise as well as real. Almost all the prayers in the Bible are very concise. The so-called Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 is quite short. The Lord's own prayer before His departure, recorded in John 17, seems to be long; yet it is much shorter than the prayers of many of God's children today. Even the prayer of the whole church found in Acts 4 is concise. The prayer in Ephesians 1 is a most important prayer, but it can easily be finished in less than five minutes.

Many times the longer the prayers are, the more pretentious and empty they become. Only two sentences are real; the rest are all added. Those two sentences are for God to hear; all the rest are for the ears of brothers and sisters. We should instruct young believers to pray briefly, telling them that if the older ones pray their long prayers, it is all right, but the young ones should not do so. As a matter of fact, long prayers can cause great damage to the church.

Once, when a sister prayed on and on, exhausting the patience of the whole assembly, Moody did a very wise thing by standing up and saying, "While our sister continues her prayer, let us sing a hymn." May none of us

think that we can be careless during prayer meetings. If we really pray with one accord, unbelievers who happen to come in will have to acknowledge that these Christians do have something. Long prayers dissipate strength whereas concise prayers add strength to the meeting.

The writer of the *Notes on the Pentateuch*, C. H. M., spoke well when he said to please not use your prayer to ill-treat God's children. Many may not whip you with whips, but they beat you with prayers. You can hardly remain in your seat. Let God's children pray truly and concisely.

5. WITHIN THE LIMITS OF YOUR PRIVATE PRAYERS

In corporate prayers, another basic principle to practice is to never let your public prayers exceed your private prayers. This is a good rule. As you pray in private, so pray in public. Of course, you may have to adjust your prayers to suit the public, for you cannot pray in public exactly the same way as you pray in private. This is understandable. But still, your prayers in public should not exceed your prayers in private. As a matter of fact, very few private prayers are false even though equally few public prayers are true. When you come to pray with others, you tend to say what you would not say while alone. Thus you add words to your prayers.

Though public prayer is difficult and tends to be false and long and men-pleasing, yet prayers in the prayer meetings are stronger than private prayers so far as accomplishing things is concerned. God can answer the prayers of the church far more than He can answer personal prayers. The problem today, though, is that there are more answers to personal prayers than to corporate prayers. Why is it so? Because there is so much falsehood, confusion, vain

words in corporate prayers. How God would delight to answer the prayers of His children if they prayed together with simplicity and with one accord!

Exercise of Gifts Meetings

The gifts found in each local church are different. To some local churches, God may give words of revelation as well as gifts of prophecy and of teaching; to others, He may add the gift of tongues and the gift of interpreting tongues. In some places, He may give only the gift of teaching without giving any miraculous gifts; or it could be just the opposite, there being miraculous gifts without the gift of the word. We cannot dictate what God will do in His church. But what we do know is the principle of such meetings: God wishes His children to exercise their gifts. It is evident that we cannot exercise the gifts which we do not have but that we can use the gifts we do possess. Hence, no local church can imitate other local churches in this matter of exercising gifts. Each church must exercise before God whatever gifts the local brothers and sisters have. What we are describing here are meetings according to the principle of 1 Corinthians 14.

At such meetings for the exercise of gifts there may even be questions asked, for we seek to build up one another by finding light from God. So the apostle says, "When ye come together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26). If there is prophecy, let it be at the most three.

In such meetings, if there is no interpretation, let there be no speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is for per-

sonal edification, while tongues with interpretation is equivalent to prophesying. Tongues without interpretation does not edify the church because it has no effect on the understanding. For this reason, Paul forbids speaking in tongues in the meeting unless there is interpretation. He does not prohibit speaking in tongues, only speaking in tongues without interpretation in the meeting.

I. DO NOT BE PASSIVE

In this kind of meeting, all brothers who have the gift of the word should learn not to be passive. Often in these gift-exercising or so-called fellowship meetings, the brothers who are gifted to be ministers of God's Word assume a passive position, standing aside and letting other brothers speak. This is not right.

One thing new believers ought to know: not everyone may speak in the meetings for the exercising of gifts. Only those who have gifts may speak. We do not approve of a one-man ministry, neither do we sponsor an every-man ministry. God judges both the one-man ministry and the every-man ministry as wrong. Only the gifted should supply the word; not everyone can speak. Where does the difficulty lie today? The problem is that brothers with ministry adopt an attitude that the meeting is open to every brother, whereas in actuality it is open only to those brothers gifted in ministry, not to every brother and sister. They who are mouths refuse to speak while expecting the hands, the feet, and the ears to speak! What can you expect in such a meeting but confusion? Therefore, all the brothers who are gifted should open their mouths in the meeting. As to the rest, let them speak only when they have something of value to say.

2. DISCOVER NEW GIFTS

When new believers come to this meeting, they find it rather hard for they do not know what their gifts are. Since they are so young in the faith, they cannot be considered as being ministers of the word. How, then, are they to be helped? My hope is that the more advanced brothers will give these young brothers opportunity to speak. Do not seal their mouths, but advise them to speak simply and briefly at first so as to test out whether God has given them the ministry of the word. Give them opportunity, but not too much. Do not seal any gift and likewise do not spoil any meeting. If some are gifted, encourage them to speak longer next time. Some may have to be asked to speak more briefly later on. Constrain the gifted to proceed further; restrain the less gifted to cut the time shorter. Thus shall the meeting gather strength, and none of the mouths of the brothers will be sealed.

In serving the Lord, we must not only help people in every local assembly to know the Lord but also to discover new gifts. How can we find these gifts? It is in the meeting for the exercise of gifts. During such a meeting, we should have our eyes wide open. Encourage those on whom the Lord has laid His hand. Some like to speak, yet have neither the gift nor the ministry of the word. It is not necessary to forbid them to speak; simply ask them to speak less. Thus shall the young believers be helped as well as be given a chance to help others.

Ministry Meetings

This is the least important of all meetings; still it is a

part of God's established order and thus should not be neglected. Through such meetings, we may receive the supply of God's word. We may have the opportunity to hear the word when an apostle comes our way or when some teachers and prophets reside with us. I do not suggest this is not an important meeting; I merely say it is the simplest. Nevertheless, there are also matters to be learned in this meeting. When people come, they should learn to be punctual, lest they compel others to wait. They should follow the directions of the ushers and not insist on choosing their own seats. They should also bring their own Bibles and hymnbooks.

1. LET HEARTS BE OPEN

In attending such meetings, on the spiritual side the first preparation is that the heart must be open. He who listens with prejudice will never get anything. He whose heart is closed will not receive any blessing from God. Let no one sit there to criticize. It is the hearer, not the critic, whom God will bless. I often say that whether a message is well delivered or not depends half on the preacher and half on the audience. No preacher can carry a meeting if he is met with closed hearts, tightly shut minds, or critical attitudes.

2. LET SPIRITS BE OPEN

As the heart needs to be open, so must the spirit. It is of great importance that the spirit of the audience be open. When a true minister of the word is ministering, his spirit is open. If he can touch an open spirit in the audience, then his spirit will be strengthened. If he does not meet a responsive spirit in the meeting or if he encounters an indifferent or closed spirit, his own spirit will turn back as

the dove returned to the ark. The spirit of both the preacher and the audience must be released. The greater the release of the spirit of the audience, the stronger the spirit of the prophet becomes. If the spirit of the brothers and sisters does not come forth, neither can that of the prophet. Whether the word is released depends in large measure on the hearers. Therefore, learn to be tender and meek. Let us open our spirits that the Holy Spirit may come forth! Let us not be full of coldness, death, or opinions. Let us contribute to the spirit of the meeting, not obstruct it. Our spirits can either help or hinder the release of the spirit of the prophet. If new believers learn the lesson here, they will contribute to the strength of the meeting.

The above are the five different types of meetings which we find in the Bible. I believe Christianity has in its very nature the need to assemble. If we know how to meet, then the next generation will become stronger. May we gird ourselves that we may arrive at the goal which God has set for us. May God be gracious to us.

*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by
faith without the deeds of the law.*

Romans 3. 28

II

THE TRUE FOUNDATION

I WANT to consider this statement with you in the light of the fundamental text which we began to consider last time.

There can be no doubt but that the condition known as spiritual depression is a very common complaint, indeed the more one thinks about it and the more one speaks about it, the more one discovers how common it is. We are considering this condition because, as I have suggested, there are at least two great reasons for our doing so. The first is that it is very sad that anybody should remain in such a condition. But the second reason is still more serious and important, that is that such people are very poor representatives of the Christian faith. As we face the modern world with all its trouble and turmoil and with all its difficulties and sadness, nothing is more important than that we who call ourselves Christian, and who claim the Name of Christ, should be representing our faith in such a way before others, as to give them the impression that here is the solution, and here the answer. In a world where everything has gone so sadly astray, we should be standing out as men and women apart, people characterized by a fundamental joy and certainty in spite of conditions, in spite of adversity. Now that, I think you will agree, is the picture which is given of God's people everywhere in the Scriptures, whether it is the Old Testament or the New. Those men of God stood out in that way, and, whatever their circumstances and conditions, they seemed to possess a secret which enabled them to live triumphantly and to be more than conquerors. It therefore behoves us to examine this state of spiritual depression very closely.

We have already looked at the condition in general and considered some of its main causes. We have already seen that the essence of the treatment according to the Psalmist is that we must really face ourselves. In other words we must talk to ourselves instead of allowing ourselves to talk to us. We must take ourselves in hand, we must address ourselves as the Psalmist addressed himself and his soul, and ask the question: 'Why art thou cast

down? why art thou disquieted within me?"—You have no right to be like this. Why are you depressed and cast down? He faces himself and talks to himself, he argues with himself and brings himself back to the position of faith. He exhorts himself to have faith in God, and then he is in a condition to pray to God.

I want to take up this method which is advocated by the Psalmist. The vital principle is that we must face ourselves and examine ourselves, and if we are among those that never seem to know the joy of salvation and the joy of the Lord, we must discover the cause. The causes are many, and it seems to me that the essence of wisdom in this matter is to deal with these causes one by one and to take them in detail. Nothing must be taken for granted. Indeed it could easily be established that the main cause of trouble in this matter is the fatal tendency to take things for granted. More and more do I find this to be the case as I talk to others about these matters. There are so many people who never seem to arrive at the true Christian position because they are not clear in their minds about certain primary matters, certain fundamental things that should be dealt with at the beginning.

At the risk of being misunderstood at this point, let us put it like this: The particular trouble with which we are dealing tends, I find, to be common among those who have been brought up in a religious manner rather than in those who have not been brought up in a religious manner. It is more likely to affect those who have been brought up in Christian homes and families and who have always been taken to a place of worship than those who have not. There are many such people who seem to go right through their lives in the way described by Shakespeare as 'bound in shallows and in miseries'. They never seem to get out of it. They are in the realm of the Church, and very interested in Christian things; and yet when you compare them with the New Testament description of the new man in Christ you see at once that there is a great difference. Indeed they themselves see that, and this is often the main cause of their depression and their unhappiness. They see other Christians rejoicing and they say: 'Well, I cannot say that I am like that. That person has got something that I have not got', and they would give the whole world if they could but get something which the other person has. They take up Christian biographies and read the lives of various saints who have adorned the life of the Christian Church, and they admit at once that they are not like them. They know that

they have never been like them, and that there is something which those people obviously enjoyed which they themselves have never had.

There are large numbers of people in this unhappy situation. The Christian life seems to them to be a constant problem, and they are always asking the same question. 'Why cannot I get there? Why cannot I be like that?' They read books which are meant to give instruction about the Christian way of life, they attend meetings and conferences, always seeking this something which they do not find. And they are cast down, their souls are cast down and disquieted within them.

Now it is all-important, as we face such people, to be quite certain that they are clear in their minds about the primary and most fundamental principles of the Christian faith. Many and many a time I have found in talking to them that their real trouble lies just here. I would not say that they are not Christians but I am suggesting that they are what I would call miserable Christians, simply because they have not understood the way of salvation, and for that reason all their beliefs and efforts have been more or less useless. They often concentrate on the question of sanctification, but it does not help them because they have not understood justification. Having assumed that they were on the right road, they assume that all they have to do is to continue along it.

It is an interesting theological point as to whether such people are Christians or not. For myself I would say they are. The classic example is of course John Wesley. I would hesitate to say that John Wesley was not a Christian until 1738; but I am certain of this, that John Wesley had not understood the way of salvation as justification by faith only, until 1738. He had in a sense subscribed to the full teaching of the Bible, but he had not understood it, nor fully apprehended it. I have no doubt that if you had questioned him he would have given the correct answers even about the death of our Lord; and yet in experience he was not clear about justification by faith. You will recall that it was only as the result of his meeting with the Moravian brethren, and in particular the conversation he had with one called Peter Böhler, on a journey from London to Oxford, that he was truly made to understand this vital doctrine. There was a man who had been trying to find happiness in his Christian life by doing things, preaching to the prisoners in Oxford, giving up his fellowship of

his college, and facing the hazards of crossing the Atlantic in order to preach to pagans in Georgia. He was trying to find happiness by living life in a given way. In fact the whole trouble with John Wesley really was that he had never understood or grasped the doctrine of justification by faith. He had not understood this verse that we are considering: 'Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law'. It seems almost impossible that such a man, who had been brought up in an unusually godly home and who had spent all his life and all his time in Christian work, should be wrong about a first and so fundamental a point and should have been wrong at the very beginning. But so it was.

I am suggesting that this is the case with large numbers of people still. They have assumed that they are right about the first things, but they never have been right about their justification, and it is just here that the devil causes confusion. It suits him well that such people should be concerned about sanctification and holiness and various other things, but they can never be right until they are right here, and that is why we must start with this. It is no use going on to deal with the superstructure if the foundation is not right. We therefore start with this great doctrine. This confusion is an old trouble. In a sense it is the masterpiece of Satan. He will even encourage us to be righteous as long as he has us confused at this point. That he is doing so at the present time is clear from the fact that the average person in the Church seems to regard men as Christian simply because they do good works, even though they may be entirely wrong about this preliminary truth. It is an old trouble, and it was the essential trouble with the Jews. It is what our Lord was continually saying to the Pharisees, and it certainly was the major argument which the Apostle Paul had with the Jews. They were entirely wrong with regard to the whole question of the Law, and the main problem was to show them the right view of it. The Jews believed that the Law was made by God in order that man might save himself by keeping it. They said that all one had to do was to keep the Law, and that if you kept the Law you would justify yourself, and that if you led your life according to the Law, God would accept you and you would be well pleasing in His sight. And they believed that they could do that, because they had never understood the Law. They put their own interpretation on it and made of it something that was well within their reach.

And so they thought that all was well. That is the picture of the Pharisees given in the Gospels and everywhere in the New Testament. It was the whole essential trouble with the Jews, and it is still the essence of the problem with many people. We have to realize that there are certain things about which we must be perfectly clear before we can really hope to have peace, and to enjoy the Christian life.

This preliminary point is one which we can well put by a general exposition of the teaching of this third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The first four chapters of this great and mighty Epistle are really devoted to this one theme. The one thing Paul was anxious to make clear was this message about the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ. He had already said in chapter 1. 16, 17: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written the just shall live by faith'. Yes, but the question was, why did not everybody believe that? Why was this not accepted almost automatically by all who heard it, as the greatest good news that had ever come into the world? The answer is that they did not believe it because they did not see the need of it. They had the wrong view of righteousness. The righteousness of which Paul speaks means rightness with God. There is no happiness finally, there is no peace, there is no joy except we be right with God. Now that is agreed by all, that is assented to by the miserable Christian as well as the assured Christian. Yes, but the whole difference between the one and the other is that the former, the miserable Christian, is wrong in his ideas as to how this rightness with God is to be obtained. That was the trouble with the Jews also. They held, as I have reminded you, that this rightness is attained by conforming to the Law as they understood it, and keeping it. But their whole view of the Law was entirely wrong. They perverted it, with the result that the very thing which God had given them to further His way of salvation had become in their hands the main obstacle to it.

What then is the teaching? There are certain simple principles about which we must be quite clear before we can ever hope to enjoy this Christian salvation. The first is conviction of sin. We must be absolutely clear about our sinfulness. Here I follow the method of the Apostle Paul and raise an imaginary objection.

I imagine someone saying at once: 'Are you going to preach to us about sin, are you going to preach about conviction of sin? You say your object is to make us happy but if you are going to preach to us about conviction of sin, surely that is going to make us still more unhappy. Are you deliberately trying to make us miserable and wretched?' To which the simple reply is, Yes! That is the teaching of the great Apostle in these chapters. It may sound paradoxical—the term does not matter—but beyond any question that is the rule, and there are no exceptions. You must be made miserable before you can know true Christian joy. Indeed the real trouble with the miserable Christian is that he has never been truly made miserable because of conviction of sin. He has by-passed the essential preliminary to joy, he has been assuming something that he has no right to assume.

Let me put it again in a Scriptural statement. You remember the aged Simeon standing with the infant Lord Jesus Christ in his arms? He said a very profound thing when he said: 'This Child is set for the fall and for the rising again of many in Israel'. There is no rising again until there has been a preliminary fall. This is an absolute rule, and yet this is the thing that is being so sadly forgotten by so many today, and assumed by as many more. But the Scripture has its order, and its order must be observed if we are to derive the benefits of the Christian salvation. Ultimately, the only thing which is going to drive a man to Christ and make him rely upon Christ alone, is a true conviction of sin. We go astray because we are not truly convicted of our sin. That is why I say that this is in particular the problem of all those who have been brought up in a religious or Christian manner. Their chief trouble often is their wrong idea of sin. I remember such a person putting this very dramatically to me on one occasion. She was a woman who had been brought up in a very religious home, who had always attended a place of worship and been busily and actively engaged in the life of the Church. She was then a member in a church where a number of people had been converted suddenly from the world and from various kinds of evil living—drunkenness and such like things. I well remember her saying to me: 'You know, I almost wish that I had not been brought up in the way I have been brought up. I could wish that I had been living their kind of life in order that I might have their marvellous experience'. What did she mean? What she was really saying was that she had never seen herself as a sinner.

GOSPEL

almost

Why not? There are many reasons. That kind of person thinks of sin only in terms of action, in terms of sins. Not only that, but in terms of certain particular actions only. So their tendency is to think that because they have not been guilty of these particular things, that they are not really sinners at all. Indeed, sometimes they put it quite plainly and say: 'I have never really thought of myself as a sinner: but of course that is not surprising as my life has been sheltered from the beginning. I have never been tempted to do these things, and it is not surprising therefore that I have never felt myself to be a sinner'. Now there we see the very essence of this fallacy. Their thinking is in terms of actions, particular actions, and of comparisons with other people and their experiences, and so on. For this reason they have never had a real conviction of sin, and because of that they have never plainly seen their utter absolute need of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have heard it preached that Christ has died for our sins and they say that they believe that; but they have never really known its absolute necessity for themselves.

How then can such people be convicted of sin? That is Paul's subject in this third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. He has really been dealing with it throughout the second chapter also. This is his way of doing it, this is his great thesis: 'There is none righteous, no not one, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God'. Who are these 'all'? He keeps on telling us, Jews as well as Gentiles. The Jews would of course agree that the Gentiles were certainly sinners, outside the pale, sinners against God. 'But wait a minute,' says Paul in effect, 'you are equally sinners'. The reason why the Jews hated Christ and crucified Him, the whole explanation of 'the offence of the Cross', the reason why Paul was treated as he was by his fellow countrymen who hated the Christian faith, was that the Christian faith said that the Jew was as much a sinner as the Gentile. It asserts that the Jew—the person who thought he had always lived a righteous and religious life—is as much a sinner as the most flagrant sinner amongst the Gentiles. 'All have sinned', Jews and Gentiles are equally condemned before God.

The same is true today, and if we are concerned about a conviction of sin, the first thing we have to do is stop thinking about particular sins. How difficult we all find this. We have all got these prejudices. We confine sin to certain things only, and because we are not guilty of these we think that we are not

sinner. But that is not the way to know conviction of sin. It was not in that way that John Wesley came to see himself as a sinner. You remember what brought him to a conviction of sin? It began when he saw the way in which some Moravian Brethren behaved during a storm in mid-Atlantic. John Wesley was terrified by the storm and afraid to die; the Moravians were not. They seemed to be as happy in the hurricane and in the midst of the storm as they were when the sun was shining. John Wesley realized that he was afraid of death, he somehow did not seem to know God as these people knew Him. In other words he began to feel his need, and that is always the beginning of a conviction of sin.

The essential point is, that the way to know yourself a sinner is not to compare yourself with other people; it is to come face to face with the Law of God. Well, what is God's Law? Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal? 'I have never done that, therefore I am not a sinner.' But, my friend, that is not the Law of God in its entirety. Would you like to know what the Law of God is? Here it is—'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mark 12. 30, 31). Forget all about drunkards and their like, forget all the people you read about in the press at the present time. Here is the test for you and me: Are you loving God with all your being? If you are not, you are a sinner. That is the test. 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' God has made us and He has made us for Himself. He made man for His own glory and He intended man to live entirely for Him. Man was to be His representative, and was to dwell in communion with Him. He was to be the lord of the universe, he was to glorify God. As it is put in the Shorter Catechism: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever', and if you are not doing so you are a sinner of the deepest dye, whether you know it and feel it or not.

Or let me put it like this. I find this is a very valuable way of approaching the subject. God knows I am preaching my own experience to you for I was brought up in a religious manner myself. I am also preaching my experience as one who has frequently to help people who have been brought up in the same way. Man is meant to know God. So the question is: Do you know God? I am not asking if you believe in God, or if you

believe certain things about Him. To be a Christian is to have eternal life, and as our Lord says in John 17. 3: 'This is life eternal to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent'. So the test we apply to ourselves is that. Not, 'Have I done this or that?' My test is a positive one: 'Do I know God? Is Jesus Christ real to me?' I am not asking whether you know things about Him but do you know God, are you enjoying God, is God the centre of your life, the soul of your being, the source of your greatest joy? He is meant to be. He made man in such a way that that was to be the position, that man might dwell in communion with God and enjoy God and walk with God. You and I are meant to be like that, and if we are not like that, it is sin. That is the essence of sin. We have no right not to be like that. That is sin of the deepest and worst type. The essence of sin, in other words, is that we do not live entirely to the glory of God. Of course by committing particular sins we aggravate our guilt before God, but you can be innocent of all gross sins and yet be guilty of this terrible thing, of being satisfied with your life, of having pride in your achievements and of looking down on others and feeling that you are better than others. There is nothing worse than that because you are saying to yourself that you are somehow nearer to God than they are, and yet the whole time you are not. If that is your attitude you are like the Pharisee in the temple who thanked God that he was not like the other man—'this publican'. The Pharisee had never seen the need of forgiveness and there is no more terrible sin than that. I know of nothing worse than the person who says: 'You know I have never really felt that I am a sinner'. That is the height of sin because it means that you have never realized the truth about God and the truth about yourself. Read the argument of the Apostle Paul and you will find that his logic is not only inevitable, but also unanswerable. 'There is none righteous, no not one.' 'We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God.' If you have never realized your guilt or guiltiness before God you will never have joy in Christ. It is impossible. 'Not the righteous, sinners Jesus came to save.' 'They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.'

There is the first thing—conviction of sin. If you have not a conviction of sin, and if you do not realize that you are un-

worthy before God, and that you are utterly condemned and a complete failure before God, pay attention to nothing else until you have it, until you come to this realization, because you will never find joy, you will never get rid of your depression until you are right about that. Conviction of sin is an essential preliminary to a true experience of salvation.

This brings me to the second principle. The second thing the true Christian realizes is God's way of salvation in Christ. This is the great good news. 'This is the thing I am preaching', says Paul, in effect, to the Romans, 'this righteousness that is of God, that is in Jesus Christ, His righteousness.' What is he talking about? It can be put in the form of a question if you like. What is your view of Christ? Why did He come into the world? What has God done in Christ? Is He merely a teacher, an example, and so on? I shall not waste your time by showing the utter futility of all that. No, this is something positive, this righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. Salvation is all in Christ, and unless you feel yourself shut up to Christ with everything else having failed, you are not a Christian, and it is not surprising that you are not happy. 'The righteousness of God in Jesus Christ' means that God sent Him into the world in order that He might honour the Law and so men might be forgiven. Here is One who gave perfect obedience to God. Here is One, God in the flesh, who has taken human nature unto Himself and, as man, has rendered perfect homage to God, perfect allegiance, perfect obedience. God's law He kept fully and absolutely without a failure. But not only that. Paul adds other things in this classic statement of the doctrine of the Atonement; 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus'. Which means this. Before man can be reconciled to God, before man can know God, this sin of his must be removed. God has said that He will punish sin, and that the punishment of sin is death and banishment from the face of God. This has to be dealt with. And what has happened? Well, says Paul, God has set Him forth as a propitiation. That is the means which God has employed. His being the propitiation for our sins means that God has made Him responsible for our sins. They have been placed upon Him and God has dealt with them and punished them there, and

therefore because He has punished our sins in Christ, in His body upon the Cross, He can justly forgive us. You see this is high doctrine. It is a daring thing for the Apostle to say, but it has to be said and I repeat it. God, because He is righteous and holy and eternal, could not forgive the sin of man without punishing it. He said He would punish it, so He must punish it, and, blessed be His Name, He has punished it. He is just, therefore, and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. The sin has been punished, so God, Who is just and righteous, can forgive sin.

How then does it work? It works like this. God accepts this righteousness of Christ, this perfect righteousness face to face with the Law which He honoured in every respect. He has kept it and given obedience to it, He has borne its penalty. The Law is fully satisfied. God's way of salvation, says Paul, is that. He gives to us the righteousness of Christ. If we have seen our need and go to God and confess it, God will give us His own Son's righteousness. He imputes Christ's righteousness to us who believe in Him, and regards us as righteous, and declares and pronounces us to be righteous in Him. That is the way of salvation, the Christian way of salvation, the way of salvation through justification by faith. So that it comes to this. That I see and I believe and I look to nothing and to no one except to the Lord Jesus Christ. I like Paul's way of putting it. He asks: 'Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith'. You foolish Jews, says Paul, you are boasting about the fact that you have been circumcised, that you have the oracles of God and that you are God's people. You must cease to do that. You must not rest upon the fact that you have this tradition and that you are children of your forefathers. There is no boasting, you have to rest exclusively upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. The Jew is not superior to the Gentile in this respect. 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' We look to Christ and to Christ alone, and not to ourselves in any respect whatsoever.

To make it quite practical let me say that there is a very simple way of testing yourself to know whether you believe that. We betray ourselves by what we say. The Lord Himself said we should be justified by our words, and how true it is. I have often had to deal with this point with people, and I have explained the way of justification by faith and told them how it is all in Christ, and that God puts His righteousness upon us. I have

explained it all to them, and then I have said: 'Well, now are you quite happy about it, do you believe that?' And they say, 'Yes'. Then I say: 'Well, then, you are now ready to say that you are a Christian'. And they hesitate. And I know they have not understood. Then I say: 'What is the matter, why are you hesitating?' And they say: 'I do not feel that I am good enough'. At once I know that in a sense I have been wasting my breath. They are still thinking in terms of themselves; their idea still is that they have to make themselves good enough to be a Christian, good enough to be accepted with Christ. They have to do it! 'I am not good enough.' It sounds very modest, but it is the lie of the devil, it is a denial of the faith. You think that you are being humble. But you will never be good enough; nobody has ever been good enough. The essence of the Christian salvation is to say that He is good enough and that I am in Him!

As long as you go on thinking about yourself and saying: 'Ah, yes, I would like to, but I am not good enough; I am a sinner, a great sinner,' you are denying God and you will never be happy. You will continue to be cast down and disquieted in your soul. You will think you are better at times and then again you will find that you are not as good as you thought you were. You read the lives of the saints and you realize that you are nowhere. So you keep on asking: 'What can I do? I still feel that I am not good enough'. Forget yourself, forget all about yourself. Of course you are not good enough, you never will be good enough. The Christian way of salvation tells you this, that it does not matter what you have been, it does not matter what you have done. How can I put this plainly? I try to say it from the pulpit every Sunday because I think it is the thing that is robbing most people of the joy of the Lord. It does not matter if you have almost entered into the depths of hell, if you are guilty of murder as well as every other vile sin, it does not matter from the standpoint of being justified with God. You are no more hopeless than the most respectable self-righteous person in the world. Do you believe that?

There is another good way of testing yourself. Do you believe that from the standpoint of salvation and justification with God that all our customary distinctions are abolished at a stroke and that what determines whether we are sinners or not is not what we have done, but our relationship to God? I say, therefore, that this is the test, that you acknowledge readily and say clearly

that you look to Christ and to Christ alone and to nothing and no one else, that you stop looking at particular sins and particular people. Look at nothing and nobody but look entirely to Christ and say:

'My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesu's blood and righteousness,
I dare not trust my sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesu's Name.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.'

You must so believe that as to be able to go further and say with holy boldness:

The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do,
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.'

Would you like to be rid of this spiritual depression? The first thing you have to do is to say farewell now once and for ever to your past. Realize that it has been covered and blotted out in Christ. Never look back at your sins again. Say: 'It is finished, it is covered by the Blood of Christ'. That is your first step. Take that and finish with yourself and all this talk about goodness, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only then that true happiness and joy are possible for you. What you need is not to make resolutions to live a better life, to start fasting and sweating and praying. No! you just begin to say:

'I rest my faith on Him alone
Who died for my transgressions to atone.'

Take that first step and you will find that immediately you will begin to experience a joy and a release that you have never known in your life before. 'Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law.' Blessed be the Name of God for such a wondrous salvation for desperate sinners.

This gifted one often feels inclined to look for those in need or distress if none is readily at hand. A severe abuse of this gift ought to be mentioned. When a person is not acting in Christ with his gift of mercy, when there is no one around in need of help and the gifted person cannot find anyone, he or she may create a problem in order to be on hand to give help. Many people play this game of "enemy-then-savior" out of a misuse of the gift. All gifts have their misuses and abuses, as well as counterfeits.

The person with the gift of mercy is often what we consider "emotional," easily given to expressing sympathy by groaning or crying when confronted with another in pain. Persons with this gift can be easily identified if you watch television dramas with them. The misery portrayed on the screen will affect them visibly. When they hear stories of sorrow and suffering from the pulpit, they are quick to rally to any attempt to relieve the misery. Because they want to know when the distress is relieved, many of them enter professions that are directly related to the relief of suffering. Their delight is in relieving and being relieved of pain. In this respect, then, what happens between the helped and the helper is not merely a transfer of aid from one person to another in need, but a mutual fulfillment and enrichment of the participants in the exchange.

The Gifts

The Gift of Pastor

THE GREEK WORD for "pastor," *poimen*, (poi-mayn) means "shepherd." The chief scriptural references are Ephesians 4:11; John 10:1-8; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; and 1 Peter 5:1-5. The word means to protect, to oversee, to care for, to manage, to assemble, to feed. These can be taken literally or figuratively. It is a concept heavily used in the Old and New Testaments, and a very important one.

This is not one of the offices for ministry we find in the New Testament, such as deacon, elder, presbyter, and bishop. It is a gift for ministry that anyone is eligible to receive. While persons in certain offices we normally associate with ministry may be given this gift of pastoring, the gift itself is certainly not restricted to those offices.

The behavioral characteristics of the gift of pastor would, no doubt, be akin to the responsibilities of a herdsman (Old Testament) or a shepherd (New Testament). A pastor would be one able to carry a concern for a large group of members

of the body of Christ. We could define the spiritual gift as the ability God has given to various members of the body of Christ to oversee, care for, and spiritually develop a large group of members, especially over a long period of time.

This person has the drive and capacity to shoulder concern for many people at one time. He tends to be concerned about spiritual and physical needs that relate to maturation and participation in the body of Christ. He is quick to respond to a call for help, but also seeks to get others involved in the helping. Having a keen awareness of healthy and enhancing relations between people, he is often paternalistic and nurturing in his relationships. He knows that problems are going to occur and plans ahead how these may be solved. If problems do not come to his attention, he tends to go looking for them. He experiences a joy in the management of ministries for a group of people and prefers group dynamics and programs over a one-to-one ministry. He easily spots "bellwether" people (sheep) who can aid him in the ministries and he innately understands that, like sheep, many of the members will follow others more quickly than they will the appointed leader.

The one who has the gift of pastor can easily identify with the problems of others and can bring to bear upon those problems the Good News of Christ, the Good Shepherd. He always knows that he, in reality, is an "under-shepherd" of Christ (1 Peter 5:4). In preaching or teaching, he tends to lift up the gospel values that relate to peace, harmony, cohesion, unity, purpose, common goals, and fellowship, the principle being, "united we stand; divided we fall." He tends to be group-oriented rather than person-centered.

When approaching a strayed member, he is likely to think and say, "We have been missing you," or "What can we do to bring you back to us?" He has a keen sense about group dynamics and how individuals best relate to what

the group has to offer. Counting members does not offend him. This way he can keep track of possible losses, a thing shepherds fear greatly. He is also expressively concerned about growth or maturation. Physical and relational growth are indicators of his performance quality, something he takes seriously.

I have noticed that many church school teachers do not have the gift of teaching (more about this later), but do have the gift of pastoring. It would be far better for us to help them understand that what God has placed them there to do as pastors is far more important for the edification of the whole church than transferring biblical information to the members. It is a mistake to design and to develop teaching materials based on secular standards of teaching excellence and turn such over to those who are gifted to pastor, and not to teach. We need to design material that would help people pastor, if that is their gift. Does anyone ever imagine a shepherd teaching a flock? No, but we do vividly imagine such a one caring, encouraging, relating to, managing, and feeding.

There is, however, a related gift of teaching (Eph. 4:10). What if a person has both it and the pastoral gift? Those with the gift of pastoring, and not teaching, but who find themselves in charge of a class on Sunday mornings, spend more time during the week calling, caring, and visiting their class members than they do in preparing lessons. But those with the gift of teaching and not pastoring, may spend all their time preparing the lesson, never making contacts with their class members. This is also characteristic of ordained ministers. Those who have the gift of pastoring will spend most of their time in direct contact with programs and members while the ones with the gift of teaching will spend most of their time studying and preparing for their next (mostly corporate) contact with their parishioners in the classroom.

The Gift of Operations of Power (Miracles)

No particular Greek word can easily and indubitably be translated "miracles" in English. Yet, many translators do this with *dunamis* (see 1 Cor. 12:10, 28). Since, however, the words *dunamis*, *dunameis*, or *dunameon* are often translated "power" or "miracles" and since many of us shy away from the word because of certain abuses and connotations, my preference is to translate this "powerful works," from the combination of *energemata* (operations or workings) and *dunameon* (of powers) in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Whether we translate this as "miracles" or "powerful works," there it stands. And it is not beyond our ability to recognize those who have been used mightily by God to do things that go beyond even the gift of faith. Today's world needs some "powerful works" of the Spirit if we are to find meaning and purpose in the midst of so much chaos.

Scriptural references to such powerful operations are plentiful; a few of the most notable are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Acts 3:1-10; 5:9-11, 12-16; 9:32-35; and 13:8-11. This gift is the ability of some members of the body of Christ to be used of God as special means of powerful works that transcend ordinary and natural methods and ways.

The behavioral characteristics resemble those of the gift of faith, but with a slight difference. The difference is in the lack of intentionality in the use of the gift. A person to whom God has given this power of operation or work does not necessarily know what is happening. He does what he is stirred by the Holy Spirit to do, and something happens.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:6, says that there are varieties of workings (*energemata*) or results of the powerful energy of God. We do not know how and where or when these energies will flow, or how long it takes for a powerful thing

to be accomplished, but history is full of such. This gift is unlike any other. Teachers know when they are teaching, hospitable persons know when they are loving toward strangers, givers know when they are giving, leaders know when they are leading, and so on. But the person with the gift of powerful operations does not and cannot say, "Now I am going to perform a miracle! Get ready, now! Here it comes!" No, all such gifted persons express great surprise over the results of their faithfulness. Some have not lived to see the result of God's powerful working through them, but it happened. A good example is the first martyr, Stephen, and the miraculous (powerful operation) impact of his death upon Saul of Tarsus. The conversion of Saul was indeed a miracle, and so was Augustine's.

We could continue this with lives and events spreading over two thousand years, but it suffices to say, most of the great humanitarian movements and reforms, whether or not religious in motivation, were begun without a grandiose scheme for their future. Instead, as we look back now, we can see that God's power to accomplish good for mankind was obviously given to unsuspecting peoples. Such goes on today, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

The Gift of Prophecy

The Greek word for this is *propheteia* (pro-fay-tee-ah) and indicates a discourse that is divinely inspired, a declaration of the purposes of God related to a current, concrete situation—whether by reproof and correcting the wicked or comforting and admonishing the afflicted. It is the telling forth or forth telling of a truth believed to be revealed by God for the present or future. The prophet is one who divulges, makes known, speaks out for, announces, in-

structs, comforts, confronts, encourages, rebukes, convicts, and stimulates people whom God has chosen to receive a special message.

The scriptural references, for our purposes here, are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Ephesians 4:11-14; Acts 2:14-36; 15:32; 21:9-11; and Romans 12:6. The gift of prophecy is a special ability God gives some members of the body to receive and to communicate either longstanding or recently revealed truths and messages to God's chosen audiences for the purpose of building up the body and its ministries to and through itself to the world.

People with this gift are articulate. They are often capable of discerning the character and motives of people, and are able to identify evil or wrongs. They are willing to experience personal brokenness in order to understand and demonstrate the brokenness in others.

Paul illustrates this with his acceptance of suffering, hardship, and a "thorn" that caused him to experience the sufficient grace of God (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Suffering may not always be the result of evil, but rather a heavy gift of God (see 2 Cor. 4:7-12). Strongly dependent upon Scripture to validate their experiences of prophetic revelation, they tend to be frank, even caustic or tactless when they defend their statements. Often they have the experience of inner weeping as they identify personally with the sins and the evil of the world (see 2 Corinthians 11:16-30).

Normally they have a broad view of God's kingdom and righteousness, covering all of life, not just spiritual concerns. Their focus on rights and wrongs is often judged to be dogmatic and intolerant. Their emphasis is often on making decisions on the basis of what their audience already knows of God rather than the slow process of education and spiritual growth. Their bold, strict standards may hinder intimate and personal relationships. A strong sense of urgency impels them to call for a decision or response to their pro-

nouncements; they are restless as long as decisions and responses are pending. They accept the press of deadlines and are comfortable with time-lines and tables, as well as revelations, found in the Bible. They often feel that play is unimportant, even wrong, until people receive and act upon God's revealed truths. A work-ethic is important to them. They are usually results-oriented rather than process-oriented.

The Gift of Service

The Greek word for "service" is *diakonia* (dee-ak-on-ee-ah) and connotes a special service to God done in a variety of ways; mainly it has to do with menial, ordinary tasks and their extraordinary results. All the scriptural references are too numerous to list, but these are representative: Romans 12:7; Acts 1:17, 25; 20:24; 21:19; 1 Corinthians 12:5; Ephesians 4:12; and 2 Timothy 4:5.

The word *diakonia* is used in a variety of circumstances and ways, and is often translated "ministry" as well as "service." An actual tracing of these uses will uncover its representation from the most menial and basic tasks of serving the needs of fellow humans to the high privilege of serving God directly through prayers of adoration, proclaiming good news about Christ, and priestly acts on behalf of others.

While it is a fact that the term *ministry* later became descriptive of a class and rank of persons, the New Testament use of the term *diakonia* (ministry or service) did not intend anything that related to political or priestly services. The Greeks, during the time of Jesus, recognized it at once as pertaining to self-abasement—waiting tables, serving food and wine, cleaning up after a meal. This is what our Lord brought to the meaning of ministry (*diakonia*)—an honorable and loving service that could not do too much or stoop too low to show esteem for and to service the

needs of other persons (see Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:31; Luke 10:40; 17:8; John 12:2, and Acts 6:1).

The word implies the essence of discipleship as being work and service for the benefit of others, never for holy rank (hierarchy) or status. Ministry, therefore, is not a status or position, but a loving act of caring for the needs of others, whatever those needs are.

The charismatic nature of service or ministry is revealed in the life and acts of a person when there is seemingly no limit to his ability and willingness to serve in the most humbling and inferior position or circumstance (Luke 22:26, 27); serve he must!

The man or woman with the gift of service is keenly alert to detect what needs to be done and is quick to act—never waiting for someone else to “show” first. He tends to feel and display a sense of joy in whatever service is undertaken—menial or profound. He tends not to care about or even notice how menial or unpopular the task or job is. It is a form of worship and ministry to him, regardless of what it is. He displays a physical stamina, almost beyond belief, to fulfill the needs that must be met. He doesn’t usually hesitate to use personal funds to get the work done, so strong is his desire to complete the job. To leave a work undone for God would be missing the mark, a sin.

Some precautions need to be mentioned with regard to the person who serves. This person is likely to go overboard or become too involved in many projects because of the delight and joy he derives from serving. Too, his quick response to service may prompt suspicion of self-advancement and, thus, jealousy from others. For his part, he must beware of being critical of those who do not share his motivation and interest in the task. His insistence on serving rather than on being served may appear as a form of rejection of others’ attempts to express the same gift. And if he senses

insincerity—a “put-up-with-the-job” attitude among his fellow workers—this can create tension.

The essence of the gift is not law or power, not position or status, not rank or authority, not dignity or esteem, but service to the body of Christ. The variety within this one charisma is as wide and numerous as are the needs within the body. When we lay the emphasis on the body of Christ, we guard ourselves against the danger of fanaticism that comes from charisma without some form of institution; and at the same time, when we stress the importance of ministry or service as being a free-grace gift, we shore up against the other danger of being hollow or “white-washed sepulchers,” having the institution without the charisma.

The Gift of Teacher

The Greek term for this is *didaskalia* (dee-dahs-kal-ee-ah) and is a rich word meaning to teach or instruct concerning the things of God and man’s necessary response to God, especially under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Acts 13:1; and James 3:1). This is the extraordinary ability God gives to certain members of the body to expound and make simple God’s offer of redemption through Christ and his will for righteous living.

This does not necessarily mean that the person who has the gift of teaching has the gifts of knowledge and prophecy, although, in many respects and applications, they are similar. It does mean, however, that the gift of teaching will carry a special power to elucidate and illuminate, to clarify and simplify, and to illustrate the role of Jesus Christ as representative of God in man’s redemption. It may be that the charismatic teacher, gifted by God, finds it absolutely necessary to rely on other gifted persons for information, revelations, and divine disclosures. But he can do so with the added extraordinary ability to use what he receives from

them with edifying results, not only for others but also for himself (Heb. 5:12; James 3:1).

Much is being said and written today about Christian education. A multitude of institutions are devoted to teaching the Bible, religion, church history, doctrine, and theology. Because this is true, I have a deep concern that we recognize a growing problem.

There is no question about it—the early Christians slipped quickly into and became obsessed with a teaching ministry that was based on secular models. The charismatic model or mode of teaching ministry was almost, if not totally, abandoned. The pastoral Epistles reveal how quickly and how far the early church moved away from the reliance upon the Holy Spirit for instruction, correction, and sustenance, as Paul insisted and maintained to the end. This has continued throughout history, even to the present.

It grieves me to learn how many seminarians become disenchanted upon discovering that the seminary is not a community of faith but that it is seemingly obsessed with maintaining academic integrity as one department competes with other departments, all at the costly expense of offering the students little or no spiritual formation and development. Most students who survive with a sense of the "Holy Other" (a sensitivity to the presence of the Holy Spirit) are those who serve student pastorates where practical and spiritual problems constantly drive them to their knees before God for strength and guidance. Seminarians who are not blessed with the practicum of the parish while being educated tend to model their ministry after the classroom professor and wonder why the community of faith does not respond as the early New Testament peoples did to the prophets and teachers!

An associated problem is our method of training leaders and teachers in the local church. In all too many cases, no attempt is made to ensure that those we recruit and

train for leadership are experienced Christians—"born again" (John 3:3), "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), "transformed" (Rom. 12:2). Even the literature we turn over to our local leaders bears little testimony to the importance of such experiences of faith. And we wonder why churches are declining in influence, why more people leave than are received as members, and why the church is accused of not offering the "real spiritual part of religion." Teaching is the key, but only a charismatic kind.

Charismatic teachers differ from those modeled after secular standards. While they place a premium on accuracy of details, the meaning of words and phrases, they radiate with an enthusiastic devotion to Christ as Lord and Savior. They delight in reading the Bible and discover the Bible to be full of relevant messages for today. They are more inclined to search out the *meaning* of Scripture than memorize verses, events, names, and titles of books. Yet, they consider memorization of verses, events, names, and book titles indispensable aids toward grasping the meaning.

These teachers, gifted with the Holy Spirit, will not overlook the hard work of being accurate in details, correct in the use of words, and ardent in research. Yet they will balance these with appropriate personal attention to other needs of the students. To them, teaching is more than the transmission or communication of information; it carries a relational feature. Teaching, to them, becomes more than a methodology, technique, or event; it is an identification and involvement with people who are in process toward a new being in Christ. They do not find it easy simply to "deliver" a lesson to those before them in a classroom situation while having no relations with them at other times. The charismatic quality of *didaskalia* creates the motivation to be in partnership with the learners. It is a mutually benefiting relationship that carries the principle: "teaching, I am taught."

In addition to being "relational" in their teaching roles, these gifted people also delight in researching meticulous details. They tend to verbalize their feelings as well as act them out; are keenly interested in validating new information by proven systems of verification; and they have an insatiable love for books, magazines, and other reading materials. Slow to abandon well-thought-out traditional views and ways which have been effective in building up the body of Christ, they will not accept so-called "propositional truths," "scriptural accuracies," and "doctrinal exactitudes" without empirical proofs with practical value for today's living. This simply means that charismatic teachers are not interested in sifting out historical facts and fiction, but rather in finding meaning and purpose for living. The better term to describe New Testament teaching is discipling (Matt. 28:19).

The Gift of Tongues

This spiritual gift is described by the word *glōssolalia* which combines two words: *lalia*, signifying any utterance of sound, whether intelligent or unintelligent, and *glōssa*, meaning literally "tongue," but implying "language." *Glossolalia* nowhere appears in the New Testament; usually the Greek word translated "tongue(s)," is *glōssa*.

Scriptural references are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 13:1, 14:4, 5, 22; Mark 16:17; Acts 2:2-13; 10:44-46; and 19:1-7. Some Bible students also include Romans 8:26, 27 and Ephesians 6:18 as references to speaking in tongues.

Tongues is the special ability or power God gives to some members of the body to communicate in a way that may or may not resemble a known or acceptable language for the purpose of transcending the limitations of normal speech to minister to, for, and through the body of Christ.

To be sure, this has been one of the most troublesome

aspects of charismaticism, beginning early in Christian history. I do not care to enter into the debate over the gift of tongues. There are more books and pamphlets on the subject than the human family deserves, and I do not intend to add another one. We cannot, however, overlook the existence of this charism in the New Testament and its occurrence throughout history, especially since it seems that the greatest volume of interest in the subject prevails today. I simply want to point out what I have discovered as the universal characteristics of those who believe in tongues, even if they are not necessarily speakers, and of those who speak in tongues in private prayer and/or in the assembly (church).

These grace-gifted people have a very real and active prayer life, which they rarely neglect. They are inclined to pray aloud, usually beginning their prayers in their own language and moving into sounds that free up the thoughts bound by the limits of syntax and word definitions. They have a keen inclination, even a conviction, that there is much more to praying than saying the conditioned and learned words and phrases. When they pray or speak or sing in tongues, there is no stammering or sighing, neither standardized exclamations of joy nor a mumbling of gibberish. The flow is almost effortless. The genuine use of this mode of speaking is personalistic and individualistic, not copied from or set by the pattern of others. Those who are true recipients of this gift do not go into a trance or become delirious, and are not normally given to ecstasy or highly emotional aberrations. They are never out of control of their senses and feelings nor do they feel "delivered" into the control of the Holy Spirit. They are always in control of their participation.

They would not describe this as the Spirit praying or speaking for or through them. Rather, to them this is the awe-inspiring experience of having the ability to participate

fully "in the Spirit" so that a special ministry may be performed.

They do not always—perhaps rarely—know the content of what is being communicated, but they do know the joy of not being restricted by a learned language and thought pattern. They have a special sense of being in touch with God. Eventually these people discover a pattern of sounds which becomes for them a personal prayer language. Most of them so gifted are not particularly curious about what they are praying or saying—they simply feel a great sense of trust in the act of praying.

Many of those with this gift claim that when they initially experienced it, it was the most transforming and enlightening happening in their relationship to God. Eventually, however, as they matured, they became aware of the gift's being a pointer to and support of a more meaningful ministry. The gift has a twofold dimension: (1) to edify or build up the person with the gift so that (2) he or she may be inspired, directed, and strengthened to serve others effectively. Often, the gift when exercised gives a sense of direction and a release from unnecessary pressures. People feel lifted from a conditioned sense of low self-esteem to that of divinely inspired personal value and destiny. Many find deliverance from psychological and emotional problems, even to the extent of being healed of related physical illnesses, and some feel their sense of psychological balance restored so that they regain a confidence about what they can and cannot do.

In their relations with others, many find the gift an aid to loving. Their religious convictions are strengthened with its practice and their religious life is revitalized as a direct result of using the gift. They usually find that church services and the sacraments take on a new meaning, the Bible "comes to life," and prayer becomes more a means of relating than petitioning. Most of the faithful uses of this gift

give witness to a particular quality and quantity of joy, even in the midst of difficulties.

As with all of the gifts, there is a danger of "gift-projection," that is, thinking and declaring that all Christians should have this one gift. Some recipients tend to make others feel inferior or disobedient if they do not have the gift. To be sure, some appear to be out of control in the use of the tongue gift though they claim that the Holy Spirit is doing the speaking. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that the Holy Spirit does the speaking. In every case it says, "And *they* spoke in tongues."

Whenever tongues becomes divisive in the body of Christ, the burden rests on the practicer. All gifts are to edify, never to divide and tear down (Eph. 4:12-14). To pray to receive this gift is to abuse the gift. Charismata are free-favors given by God, from his own choosing. A charism sought after and petitioned for and earned through fervent prayers is no longer a free gift; it is no longer a charism.

This gift is abused when anyone thinks or promotes the idea that through it a possessor will acquire eternal bliss, whenever one uses it in public without an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27, 28), whenever a person praying in public begins in his own tongue and then prays only in his personal prayer language (1 Cor. 14:15), whenever he believes and teaches that it is the panacea for all problems and the answer to all mysteries, and whenever he separates himself from those who do not have the gift or leaves a church because this gift is not being demonstrated publicly.

The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

It is obviously essential that this gift be considered in relation to the preceding one. Without the presence of the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation would be meaningless and useless. The Greek word here is *diemeneuō* (dee-

er-main-yoo-o) and it means to make the meaning clear, to explain the message, to expound upon the meaning, to translate into another language or vernacular for understanding.

Scriptural references for this gift are 1 Corinthians 12:30 and 14:5, 13, and 27. Interpretation is not only a gift of ministry for the unfolding of a mystery hidden in a foreign or unknown language, but is also a vital work (ministry) related to the expounding of the good news of Christ's coming. An example of the latter is found in Luke 24:27, which describes how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures to the two disciples on the Emmaus road. Without question, the church has always needed this kind of clear interpretation. The gospel is too often stretched and twisted beyond recognition today. By their political schemes and theological systems and scientific principles, men take all sorts of undue liberties with the message of God's love in Christ for the world. Only sound interpretation will deliver the church from error.

Having said that, I do not confuse the normal, everyday meaning of "interpretation" with that peculiar gift of *diermeneuō*. This is the ability God gives some members of the body to hear, understand, and translate God's intended messages spoken in tongues so that the entire body can be built up and further equipped to serve as a redemptive agent for all people.

I would note these prominent characteristics of those who have the gift of interpretation. They appear to have received a meaning through a message spoken in an unknown tongue; their interpretation often coincides with rather familiar biblical passages. Often, however, they may feel they have heard no distinct message; thus, they tend to remain quiet or aloof, especially if they suspect that their gift or the speaker's gift may not be "operating." Contrasted to the

speakers, these people tend to be more deliberative and meditative.

The Gift of Wisdom

This word, translated from the Greek *sophia* (so-fee-ah), means a practical application of knowledge (divine and natural) in specific and concrete situations that call for the grace (*charis*) or favor of God.

Related references are 1 Corinthians 12:8; Matthew 12:42; Acts 6:3, 10; 7:10; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; and 2 Peter 3:15. These show various applications of intelligence on a wide range of subjects. This gift is the ability God gives to some Christians to speak, utter, write, and/or paint words that bring insight, applying God's eternal and lofty truths to the daily living and ministering of the members.

Characteristically these gifted persons appear to have an uncanny ability to make statements which, at first, may not make sense, but get to the heart of a need. An example of this is Luther's oft-repeated phrase, "Love God and do as you please." Many times, these people do not realize the wisdom of their statements but feel compelled to speak their mind, often in spite of possible challenges or charges of being simple. They often have a way of saying something that brings to light the "hidden" but obvious truth. It simply "rings true."

Often the charismatically wise person, to the chagrin of others, asks practical questions or offers suggestions related to God's will, God's kingdom, and God's glory, which almost embarrass the rest of us with their sting of realism. An example of this is when our Lord wrote something in the sand as the adulteress was being subjected to public scrutiny (John 8:3-11). What he wrote we do not know, but it was enough to bring the accusers to the poignant

reality of their own sins. They had a knowledge of the broader scope of God's laws and will, but could not see the particulars that related to them. Another example of one being able to tie broad and general knowledge of God's purposes to concrete realities was Paul's practical advice to sailors during a raging storm (Acts 27).

This gifted person has the ability not only to make a practical application of knowledge (*gnōsis*) given him by God or shared with him by another person, to concrete, specific situations. He is also able to glorify seemingly insignificant and natural situations by lifting them to the heights of divine reality. He can see, pronounce, and explain the presence of God in the most mundane and ordinary things and events. Simply put, his head is not so much in the clouds of theological mysteries that he cannot see God in the simple things in life. He comes across as a very practical person. For him, if God isn't in a marriage, a parent-child relationship, a business deal, "fun" things—and all the problems and joys related to these—then he isn't in heaven either! He does not see God as a "religious" being, but a participator in the rough and tumble of life, bringing repair, redemption, joy, love, and hope through and with the manifestation of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Special Gifts

Singleness, Exorcism, Missionary, Witnessing, Music

WITH THE TWENTY-TWO GIFTS described in the foregoing chapters, we have considered all of those that are usually encountered in the literature of spiritual gifts. However, as I have stated, the list of gifts could go on almost interminably. In time, other gifts will perhaps be recognized as charismata and there are five which I particularly want to comment upon here.

The Gift of Singleness

My reason for including this among the gifts is twofold. Paul implies that the *charis* of God is a precondition for meaningful, productive singleness (1 Cor. 7:7), and the single person is free from the concerns of marriage so he or she may serve the Lord fully.

This gift, singleness, comes from the Greek word *agamos* (ag-a-mos) which means "to be unmarried, unattached, unbound." The scriptural base is found in 1 Cor. 7:32–35 and also can be seen by implication in verse 7.

This gifted one often feels inclined to look for those in need or distress if none is readily at hand. A severe abuse of this gift ought to be mentioned. When a person is not acting in Christ with his gift of mercy, when there is no one around in need of help and the gifted person cannot find anyone, he or she may create a problem in order to be on hand to give help. Many people play this game of "enemy-then-savior" out of a misuse of the gift. All gifts have their misuses and abuses, as well as counterfeits.

The person with the gift of mercy is often what we consider "emotional," easily given to expressing sympathy by groaning or crying when confronted with another in pain. Persons with this gift can be easily identified if you watch television dramas with them. The misery portrayed on the screen will affect them visibily. When they hear stories of sorrow and suffering from the pulpit, they are quick to rally to any attempt to relieve the misery. Because they want to know when the distress is relieved, many of them enter professions that are directly related to the relief of suffering. Their delight is in relieving and being relieved of pain. In this respect, then, what happens between the helped and the helper is not merely a transfer of aid from one person to another in need, but a mutual fulfillment and enrichment of the participants in the exchange.

8

The Gifts

The Gift of Pastor

THE GREEK WORD for "pastor," *poimen*, (poi-mayn) means "shepherd." The chief scriptural references are Ephesians 4:11; John 10:1-8; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; and 1 Peter 5:1-5. The word means to protect, to oversee, to care for, to manage, to assemble, to feed. These can be taken literally or figuratively. It is a concept heavily used in the Old and New Testaments, and a very important one.

This is not one of the offices for ministry we find in the New Testament, such as deacon, elder, presbyter, and bishop. It is a gift for ministry that anyone is eligible to receive. While persons in certain offices we normally associate with ministry may be given this gift of pastoring, the gift itself is certainly not restricted to those offices.

The behavioral characteristics of the gift of pastor would, no doubt, be akin to the responsibilities of a herdsman (Old Testament) or a shepherd (New Testament). A pastor would be one able to carry a concern for a large group of members

of the body of Christ. We could define the spiritual gift as the ability God has given to various members of the body of Christ to oversee, care for, and spiritually develop a large group of members, especially over a long period of time.

This person has the drive and capacity to shoulder concern for many people at one time. He tends to be concerned about spiritual and physical needs that relate to maturation and participation in the body of Christ. He is quick to respond to a call for help, but also seeks to get others involved in the helping. Having a keen awareness of healthy and enhancing relations between people, he is often paternalistic and nurturing in his relationships. He knows that problems are going to occur and plans ahead how these may be solved. If problems do not come to his attention, he tends to go looking for them. He experiences a joy in the management of ministries for a group of people and prefers group dynamics and programs over a one-to-one ministry. He easily spots "bellwether" people (sheep) who can aid him in the ministries and he innately understands that, like sheep, many of the members will follow others more quickly than they will the appointed leader.

The one who has the gift of pastor can easily identify with the problems of others and can bring to bear upon those problems the Good News of Christ, the Good Shepherd. He always knows that he, in reality, is an "under-shepherd" of Christ (1 Peter 5:4). In preaching or teaching, he tends to lift up the gospel values that relate to peace, harmony, cohesion, unity, purpose, common goals, and fellowship, the principle being, "united we stand, divided we fall." He tends to be group-oriented rather than person-centered.

When approaching a strayed member, he is likely to think and say, "We have been missing you," or "What can we do to bring you back to us?" He has a keen sense about group dynamics and how individuals best relate to what

the group has to offer. Counting members does not offend him. This way he can keep track of possible losses, a thing shepherds fear greatly. He is also expressively concerned about growth or maturation. Physical and relational growth are indicators of his performance quality, something he takes seriously.

I have noticed that many church school teachers do not have the gift of teaching (more about this later), but do have the gift of pastoring. It would be far better for us to help them understand that what God has placed them there to do as pastors is far more important for the edification of the whole church than transferring biblical information to the members. It is a mistake to design and to develop teaching materials based on secular standards of teaching excellence and turn such over to those who are gifted to pastor, and not to teach. We need to design material that would help people pastor, if that is their gift. Does anyone ever imagine a shepherd teaching a flock? No, but we do vividly imagine such a one caring, encouraging, relating to, managing, and feeding.

There is, however, a related gift of teaching (Eph. 4:10). What if a person has both it and the pastoral gift? Those with the gift of pastoring, and not teaching, but who find themselves in charge of a class on Sunday mornings, spend more time during the week calling, caring, and visiting their class members than they do in preparing lessons. But those with the gift of teaching and not pastoring, may spend all their time preparing the lesson, never making contacts with their class members. This is also characteristic of ordained ministers. Those who have the gift of pastoring will spend most of their time in direct contact with programs and members while the ones with the gift of teaching will spend most of their time studying and preparing for their next (mostly corporate) contact with their parishioners in the classroom.

The Gift of Operations of Power (Miracles)

No particular Greek word can easily and indubitably be translated "miracles" in English. Yet, many translators do this with *dunamis* (see 1 Cor. 12:10, 28). Since, however, the words *dunamis*, *dunameis*, or *dunameon* are often translated "power" or "miracles" and since many of us shy away from the word because of certain abuses and connotations, my preference is to translate this "powerful works," from the combination of *energemata* (operations or workings) and *dunameon* (of powers) in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Whether we translate this as "miracles" or "powerful works," there it stands. And it is not beyond our ability to recognize those who have been used mightily by God to do things that go beyond even the gift of faith. Today's world needs some "powerful works" of the Spirit if we are to find meaning and purpose in the midst of so much chaos.

Scriptural references to such powerful operations are plentiful; a few of the most notable are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Acts 3:1-10; 5:9-11, 12-16; 9:32-35; and 13:8-11. This gift is the ability of some members of the body of Christ to be used of God as special means of powerful works that transcend ordinary and natural methods and ways.

The behavioral characteristics resemble those of the gift of faith, but with a slight difference. The difference is in the lack of intentionality in the use of the gift. A person to whom God has given this power of operation or work does not necessarily know what is happening. He does what he is stirred by the Holy Spirit to do, and something happens.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:6, says that there are varieties of workings (*energemata*) or results of the powerful energy of God. We do not know how and where or when these energies will flow, or how long it takes for a powerful thing

to be accomplished, but history is full of such. This gift is unlike any other. Teachers know when they are teaching, hospitable persons know when they are loving toward strangers, givers know when they are giving, leaders know when they are leading, and so on. But the person with the gift of powerful operations does not and cannot say, "Now I am going to perform a miracle! Get ready, now! Here it comes!" No, all such gifted persons express great surprise over the results of their faithfulness. Some have not lived to see the result of God's powerful working through them, but it happened. A good example is the first martyr, Stephen, and the miraculous (powerful operation) impact of his death upon Saul of Tarsus. The conversion of Saul was indeed a miracle, and so was Augustine's.

We could continue this with lives and events spreading over two thousand years, but it suffices to say, most of the great humanitarian movements and reforms, whether or not religious in motivation, were begun without a grandiose scheme for their future. Instead, as we look back now, we can see that God's power to accomplish good for mankind was obviously given to unsuspecting peoples. Such goes on today, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

The Gift of Prophecy

The Greek word for this is *propheteia* (pro-fay-tee-ah) and indicates a discourse that is divinely inspired, a declaration of the purposes of God related to a current, concrete situation—whether by reproving and correcting the wicked or comforting and admonishing the afflicted. It is the telling forth or forth telling of a truth believed to be revealed by God for the present or future. The prophet is one who divulges, makes known, speaks out for, announces, in-

structs, comforts, confronts, encourages, rebukes, convicts, and stimulates people whom God has chosen to receive a special message.

The scriptural references, for our purposes here, are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Ephesians 4:11-14; Acts 2:14-36; 15:32; 21:9-11; and Romans 12:6. The gift of prophecy is a special ability God gives some members of the body to receive and to communicate either longstanding or recently revealed truths and messages to God's chosen audiences for the purpose of building up the body and its ministries to and through itself to the world.

People with this gift are articulate. They are often capable of discerning the character and motives of people, and are able to identify evil or wrongs. They are willing to experience personal brokenness in order to understand and demonstrate the brokenness in others.

Paul illustrates this with his acceptance of suffering, hardship, and a "thorn" that caused him to experience the sufficient grace of God (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Suffering may not always be the result of evil, but rather a heavy gift of God (see 2 Cor. 4:7-12). Strongly dependent upon Scripture to validate their experiences of prophetic revelation, they tend to be frank, even caustic or tactless when they defend their statements. Often they have the experience of inner weeping as they identify personally with the sins and the evil of the world (see 2 Corinthians 11:16-30).

Normally they have a broad view of God's kingdom and righteousness, covering all of life, not just spiritual concerns. Their focus on rights and wrongs is often judged to be dogmatic and intolerant. Their emphasis is often on making decisions on the basis of what their audience already knows of God rather than the slow process of education and spiritual growth. Their bold, strict standards may hinder intimate and personal relationships. A strong sense of urgency impels them to call for a decision or response to their pro-

nouncements; they are restless as long as decisions and responses are pending. They accept the press of deadlines and are comfortable with time-lines and tables, as well as revelations, found in the Bible. They often feel that play is unimportant, even wrong, until people receive and act upon God's revealed truths. A work-ethic is important to them. They are usually results-oriented rather than process-oriented.

The Gift of Service

The Greek word for "service" is *diakonia* (dee-ak-on-ee-ah) and connotes a special service to God done in a variety of ways; mainly it has to do with menial, ordinary tasks and their extraordinary results. All the scriptural references are too numerous to list, but these are representative: Romans 12:7; Acts 1:17, 25; 20:24; 21:19; 1 Corinthians 12:5; Ephesians 4:12; and 2 Timothy 4:5.

The word *diakonia* is used in a variety of circumstances and ways, and is often translated "ministry" as well as "service." An actual tracing of these uses will uncover its representation from the most menial and basic tasks of serving the needs of fellow humans to the high privilege of serving God directly through prayers of adoration, proclaiming good news about Christ, and priestly acts on behalf of others.

While it is a fact that the term *ministry* later became descriptive of a class and rank of persons, the New Testament use of the term *diakonia* (ministry or service) did not intend anything that related to political or priestly services. The Greeks, during the time of Jesus, recognized it at once as pertaining to self-abasement—waiting tables, serving food and wine, cleaning up after a meal. This is what our Lord brought to the meaning of ministry (*diakonia*)—an honorable and loving service that could not do too much or stoop too low to show esteem for and to service the

needs of other persons (see Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:31; Luke 10:40; 17:8; John 12:2, and Acts 6:1).

The word implies the essence of discipleship as being work and service for the benefit of others, never for holy rank (hierarchy) or status. Ministry, therefore, is not a status or position, but a loving act of caring for the needs of others, whatever those needs are.

The charismatic nature of service or ministry is revealed in the life and acts of a person when there is seemingly no limit to his ability and willingness to serve in the most humbling and inferior position or circumstance (Luke 22:26, 27); serve he must!

The man or woman with the gift of service is keenly alert to detect what needs to be done and is quick to act—never waiting for someone else to “show” first. He tends to feel and display a sense of joy in whatever service is undertaken—menial or profound. He tends not to care about or even notice how menial or unpopular the task or job is. It is a form of worship and ministry to him, regardless of what it is. He displays a physical stamina, almost beyond belief, to fulfill the needs that must be met. He doesn't usually hesitate to use personal funds to get the work done, so strong is his desire to complete the job. To leave a work undone for God would be missing the mark, a sin.

Some precautions need to be mentioned with regard to the person who serves. This person is likely to go overboard or become too involved in many projects because of the delight and joy he derives from serving. Too, his quick response to service may prompt suspicion of self-advancement and, thus, jealousy from others. For his part, he must beware of being critical of those who do not share his motivation and interest in the task. His insistence on serving rather than on being served may appear as a form of rejection of others' attempts to express the same gift. And if he senses

insincerity—a “put-up-with-the-job” attitude among his fellow workers—this can create tension.

The essence of the gift is not law or power, not position or status, not rank or authority, not dignity or esteem, but service to the body of Christ. The variety within this one charisma is as wide and numerous as are the needs within the body. When we lay the emphasis on the body of Christ, we guard ourselves against the danger of fanaticism that comes from charisma without some form of institution; and at the same time, when we stress the importance of ministry or service as being a free-grace gift, we shore up against the other danger of being hollow or “white-washed sepulchers,” having the institution without the charisma.

The Gift of Teacher

The Greek term for this is *didaskalia* (dee-dahs-kal-ee-ah) and is a rich word meaning to teach or instruct concerning the things of God and man's necessary response to God, especially under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Acts 13:1; and James 3:1). This is the extraordinary ability God gives to certain members of the body to expound and make simple God's offer of redemption through Christ and his will for righteous living.

This does not necessarily mean that the person who has the gift of teaching has the gifts of knowledge and prophecy, although, in many respects and applications, they are similar. It does mean, however, that the gift of teaching will carry a special power to elucidate and illuminate, to clarify and simplify, and to illustrate the role of Jesus Christ as representative of God in man's redemption. It may be that the charismatic teacher, gifted by God, finds it absolutely necessary to rely on other gifted persons for information, revelations, and divine disclosures. But he can do so with the added extraordinary ability to use what he receives from

them with edifying results, not only for others but also for himself (Heb. 5:12; James 3:1).

Much is being said and written today about Christian education. A multitude of institutions are devoted to teaching the Bible, religion, church history, doctrine, and theology. Because this is true, I have a deep concern that we recognize a growing problem.

There is no question about it—the early Christians slipped quickly into and became obsessed with a teaching ministry that was based on secular models. The charismatic model or mode of teaching ministry was almost, if not totally, abandoned. The pastoral Epistles reveal how quickly and how far the early church moved away from the reliance upon the Holy Spirit for instruction, correction, and sustenance, as Paul insisted and maintained to the end. This has continued throughout history, even to the present.

It grieves me to learn how many seminarians become disenchanted upon discovering that the seminary is not a community of faith but that it is seemingly obsessed with maintaining academic integrity as one department competes with other departments, all at the costly expense of offering the students little or no spiritual formation and development. Most students who survive with a sense of the "Holy Other" (a sensitivity to the presence of the Holy Spirit) are those who serve student pastorates where practical and spiritual problems constantly drive them to their knees before God for strength and guidance. Seminarians who are not blessed with the practicum of the parish while being educated tend to model their ministry after the classroom professor and wonder why the community of faith does not respond as the early New Testament peoples did to the prophets and teachers!

An associated problem is our method of training leaders and teachers in the local church. In all too many cases, no attempt is made to ensure that those we recruit and

train for leadership are experienced Christians—"born again" (John 3:3), "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), "transformed" (Rom. 12:2). Even the literature we turn over to our local leaders bears little testimony to the importance of such experiences of faith. And we wonder why churches are declining in influence, why more people leave than are received as members, and why the church is accused of not offering the "real spiritual part of religion." Teaching is the key, but only a charismatic kind.

Charismatic teachers differ from those modeled after secular standards. While they place a premium on accuracy of details, the meaning of words and phrases, they radiate with an enthusiastic devotion to Christ as Lord and Savior. They delight in reading the Bible and discover the Bible to be full of relevant messages for today. They are more inclined to search out the *meaning* of Scripture than memorize verses, events, names, and titles of books. Yet, they consider memorization of verses, events, names, and book titles indispensable aids toward grasping the meaning.

These teachers, gifted with the Holy Spirit, will not overlook the hard work of being accurate in details, correct in the use of words, and ardent in research. Yet they will balance these with appropriate personal attention to other needs of the students. To them, teaching is more than the transmission or communication of information; it carries a relational feature. Teaching, to them, becomes more than a methodology, technique, or event; it is an identification and involvement with people who are in process toward a new being in Christ. They do not find it easy simply to "deliver" a lesson to those before them in a classroom situation while having no relations with them at other times. The charismatic quality of *didaskalia* creates the motivation to be in partnership with the learners. It is a mutually benefiting relationship that carries the principle: "teaching, I am taught."

In addition to being "relational" in their teaching roles, these gifted people also delight in researching meticulous details. They tend to verbalize their feelings as well as act them out; are keenly interested in validating new information by proven systems of verification; and they have an insatiable love for books, magazines, and other reading materials. Slow to abandon well-thought-out traditional views and ways which have been effective in building up the body of Christ, they will not accept so-called "propositional truths," "scriptural accuracies," and "doctrinal exactitudes" without empirical proofs with practical value for today's living. This simply means that charismatic teachers are not interested in sifting out historical facts and fiction, but rather in finding meaning and purpose for living. The better term to describe New Testament teaching is discipling (Matt. 28:19).

The Gift of Tongues

This spiritual gift is described by the word *glōssolalia* which combines two words: *lalia*, signifying any utterance of sound, whether intelligent or unintelligent, and *glōssa*, meaning literally "tongue," but implying "language." Glos-salalia nowhere appears in the New Testament; usually the Greek word translated "tongue(s)," is *glōssa*.

Scriptural references are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 13:1; 14:4, 5, 22; Mark 16:17; Acts 2:2-13; 10:44-46; and 19:1-7. Some Bible students also include Romans 8:26, 27 and Ephesians 6:18 as references to speaking in tongues.

Tongues is the special ability or power God gives to some members of the body to communicate in a way that may or may not resemble a known or acceptable language for the purpose of transcending the limitations of normal speech to minister to, for, and through the body of Christ.

To be sure, this has been one of the most troublesome

aspects of charismatism, beginning early in Christian history. I do not care to enter into the debate over the gift of tongues. There are more books and pamphlets on the subject than the human family deserves, and I do not intend to add another one. We cannot, however, overlook the existence of this charism in the New Testament and its occurrence throughout history, especially since it seems that the greatest volume of interest in the subject prevails today. I simply want to point out what I have discovered as the universal characteristics of those who believe in tongues, even if they are not necessarily speakers, and of those who speak in tongues in private prayer and/or in the assembly (church).

These grace-gifted people have a very real and active prayer life, which they rarely neglect. They are inclined to pray aloud, usually beginning their prayers in their own language and moving into sounds that free up the thoughts bound by the limits of syntax and word definitions. They have a keen inclination, even a conviction, that there is much more to praying than saying the conditioned and learned words and phrases. When they pray or speak or sing in tongues, there is no stammering or sighing, neither standardized exclamations of joy nor a mumbling of gibberish. The flow is almost effortless. The genuine use of this mode of speaking is personalistic and individualistic, not copied from or set by the pattern of others. Those who are true recipients of this gift do not go into a trance or become delirious, and are not normally given to ecstasy or highly emotional aberrations. They are never out of control of their senses and feelings nor do they feel "delivered" into the control of the Holy Spirit. They are always in control of their participation.

They would not describe this as the Spirit praying or speaking for or through them. Rather, to them this is the awe-inspiring experience of having the ability to participate

fully "in the Spirit" so that a special ministry may be performed.

They do not always—perhaps rarely—know the content of what is being communicated, but they do know the joy of not being restricted by a learned language and thought pattern. They have a special sense of being in touch with God. Eventually these people discover a pattern of sounds which becomes for them a personal prayer language. Most of them so gifted are not particularly curious about what they are praying or saying—they simply feel a great sense of trust in the act of praying.

Many of those with this gift claim that when they initially experienced it, it was the most transforming and enlightening happening in their relationship to God. Eventually, however, as they matured, they became aware of the gift's being a pointer to and support of a more meaningful ministry. The gift has a twofold dimension: (1) to edify or build up the person with the gift so that (2) he or she may be inspired, directed, and strengthened to serve others effectively. Often, the gift when exercised gives a sense of direction and a release from unnecessary pressures. People feel lifted from a conditioned sense of low self-esteem to that of divinely inspired personal value and destiny. Many find deliverance from psychological and emotional problems, even to the extent of being healed of related physical illnesses, and some feel their sense of psychological balance restored so that they regain a confidence about what they can and cannot do.

In their relations with others, many find the gift an aid to loving. Their religious convictions are strengthened with its practice and their religious life is revitalized as a direct result of using the gift. They usually find that church services and the sacraments take on a new meaning, the Bible "comes to life," and prayer becomes more a means of relating than petitioning. Most of the faithful uses of this gift

give witness to a particular quality and quantity of joy, even in the midst of difficulties.

As with all of the gifts, there is a danger of "gift-projection," that is, thinking and declaring that all Christians should have this one gift. Some recipients tend to make others feel inferior or disobedient if they do not have the gift. To be sure, some appear to be out of control in the use of the tongue gift though they claim that the Holy Spirit is doing the speaking. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that the Holy Spirit does the speaking. In every case it says, "And *they* spoke in tongues."

Whenever tongues becomes divisive in the body of Christ, the burden rests on the practicer. All gifts are to edify, never to divide and tear down (Eph. 4:12-14). To pray to receive this gift is to abuse the gift. Charismata are free-favors given by God, from his own choosing. A charism sought after and petitioned for and earned through fervent prayers is no longer a free gift; it is no longer a charism.

This gift is abused when anyone thinks or promotes the idea that through it a possessor will acquire eternal bliss, whenever one uses it in public without an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27, 28), whenever a person praying in public begins in his own tongue and then prays only in his personal prayer language (1 Cor. 14:15), whenever he believes and teaches that it is the panacea for all problems and the answer to all mysteries, and whenever he separates himself from those who do not have the gift or leaves a church because this gift is not being demonstrated publicly.

The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

It is obviously essential that this gift be considered in relation to the preceding one. Without the presence of the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation would be meaningless and useless. The Greek word here is *diermenueō* (dee-

er-main-yoo-o) and it means to make the meaning clear, to explain the message, to expound upon the meaning, to translate into another language or vernacular for understanding.

Scriptural references for this gift are 1 Corinthians 12:30 and 14:5, 13, and 27. Interpretation is not only a gift of ministry for the unfolding of a mystery hidden in a foreign or unknown language, but is also a vital work (ministry) related to the expounding of the good news of Christ's coming. An example of the latter is found in Luke 24:27, which describes how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures to the two disciples on the Emmaus road. Without question, the church has always needed this kind of clear interpretation. The gospel is too often stretched and twisted beyond recognition today. By their political schemes and theological systems and scientific principles, men take all sorts of undue liberties with the message of God's love in Christ for the world. Only sound interpretation will deliver the church from error.

Having said that, I do not confuse the normal, everyday meaning of "interpretation" with that peculiar gift of *diermeneuō*. This is the ability God gives some members of the body to hear, understand, and translate God's intended messages spoken in tongues so that the entire body can be built up and further equipped to serve as a redemptive agent for all people.

I would note these prominent characteristics of those who have the gift of interpretation. They appear to have received a meaning through a message spoken in an unknown tongue; their interpretation often coincides with rather familiar biblical passages. Often, however, they may feel they have heard no distinct message; thus, they tend to remain quiet or aloof, especially if they suspect that their gift or the speaker's gift may not be "operating." Contrasted to the

speakers, these people tend to be more deliberative and meditative.

The Gift of Wisdom

This word, translated from the Greek *sophia* (so-fee-ah), means a practical application of knowledge (divine and natural) in specific and concrete situations that call for the grace (*charis*) or favor of God.

Related references are 1 Corinthians 12:8; Matthew 12:42; Acts 6:3, 10; 7:10; Colossians 1:28, 3:16; and 2 Peter 3:15. These show various applications of intelligence on a wide range of subjects. This gift is the ability God gives to some Christians to speak, utter, write, and/or paint words that bring insight, applying God's eternal and lofty truths to the daily living and ministering of the members.

Characteristically these gifted persons appear to have an uncanny ability to make statements which, at first, may not make sense, but get to the heart of a need. An example of this is Luther's oft-repeated phrase, "Love God and do as you please." Many times, these people do not realize the wisdom of their statements but feel compelled to speak their mind, often in spite of possible challenges or charges of being simple. They often have a way of saying something that brings to light the "hidden" but obvious truth. It simply "rings true."

Often the charismatically wise person, to the chagrin of others, asks practical questions or offers suggestions related to God's will, God's kingdom, and God's glory, which almost embarrass the rest of us with their sting of realism. An example of this is when our Lord wrote something in the sand as the adulteress was being subjected to public scrutiny (John 8:3-11). What he wrote we do not know, but it was enough to bring the accusers to the poignant

reality of their own sins. They had a knowledge of the broader scope of God's laws and will, but could not see the particulars that related to them. Another example of one being able to tie broad and general knowledge of God's purposes to concrete realities was Paul's practical advice to sailors during a raging storm (Acts 27).

This gifted person has the ability not only to make a practical application of knowledge (*gnōsis*) given him by God or shared with him by another person, to concrete, specific situations. He is also able to glorify seemingly insignificant and natural situations by lifting them to the heights of divine reality. He can see, pronounce, and explain the presence of God in the most mundane and ordinary things and events. Simply put, his head is not so much in the clouds of theological mysteries that he cannot see God in the simple things in life. He comes across as a very practical person. For him, if God isn't in a marriage, a parent-child relationship, a business deal, "fun" things—and all the problems and joys related to these—then he isn't in heaven either! He does not see God as a "religious" being, but a participator in the rough and tumble of life, bringing repair, redemption, joy, love, and hope through and with the manifestation of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

9

Special Gifts

Singleness, Exorcism, Missionary, Witnessing, Music

WITH THE TWENTY-TWO GIFTS described in the foregoing chapters, we have considered all of those that are usually encountered in the literature of spiritual gifts. However, as I have stated, the list of gifts could go on almost interminably. In time, other gifts will perhaps be recognized as charismata and there are five which I particularly want to comment upon here.

The Gift of Singleness

My reason for including this among the gifts is twofold. Paul implies that the *charis* of God is a precondition for meaningful, productive singleness (1 Cor. 7:7), and the single person is free from the concerns of marriage so he or she may serve the Lord fully.

This gift, singleness, comes from the Greek word *agamos* (ag-a-mos) which means "to be unmarried, unattached, unbound." The scriptural base is found in 1 Cor. 7:32-35 and also can be seen by implication in verse 7.

This gifted one often feels inclined to look for those in need or distress if none is readily at hand. A severe abuse of this gift ought to be mentioned. When a person is not acting in Christ with his gift of mercy, when there is no one around in need of help and the gifted person cannot find anyone, he or she may create a problem in order to be on hand to give help. Many people play this game of "enemy-then-savior" out of a misuse of the gift. All gifts have their misuses and abuses, as well as counterfeits.

The person with the gift of mercy is often what we consider "emotional," easily given to expressing sympathy by groaning or crying when confronted with another in pain. Persons with this gift can be easily identified if you watch television dramas with them. The misery portrayed on the screen will affect them visibly. When they hear stories of sorrow and suffering from the pulpit, they are quick to rally to any attempt to relieve the misery. Because they want to know when the distress is relieved, many of them enter professions that are directly related to the relief of suffering. Their delight is in relieving and being relieved of pain. In this respect, then, what happens between the helped and the helper is not merely a transfer of aid from one person to another in need, but a mutual fulfillment and enrichment of the participants in the exchange.

8

The Gifts

The Gift of Pastor

THE GREEK word for "pastor," *poimen*, (poi-mayn) means "shepherd." The chief scriptural references are Ephesians 4:11; John 10:1-8; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; and 1 Peter 5:1-5. The word means to protect, to oversee, to care for, to manage, to assemble, to feed. These can be taken literally or figuratively. It is a concept heavily used in the Old and New Testaments, and a very important one.

This is not one of the offices for ministry we find in the New Testament, such as deacon, elder, presbyter, and bishop. It is a gift for ministry that anyone is eligible to receive. While persons in certain offices we normally associate with ministry may be given this gift of pastoring, the gift itself is certainly not restricted to those offices.

The behavioral characteristics of the gift of pastor would, no doubt, be akin to the responsibilities of a herdsman (Old Testament) or a shepherd (New Testament). A pastor would be one able to carry a concern for a large group of members

of the body of Christ. We could define the spiritual gift as the ability God has given to various members of the body of Christ to oversee, care for, and spiritually develop a large group of members, especially over a long period of time.

This person has the drive and capacity to shoulder concern for many people at one time. He tends to be concerned about spiritual and physical needs that relate to maturation and participation in the body of Christ. He is quick to respond to a call for help, but also seeks to get others involved in the helping. Having a keen awareness of healthy and enhancing relations between people, he is often paternalistic and nurturing in his relationships. He knows that problems are going to occur and plans ahead how these may be solved. If problems do not come to his attention, he tends to go looking for them. He experiences a joy in the management of ministries for a group of people and prefers group dynamics and programs over a one-to-one ministry. He easily spots "bellwether" people (sheep) who can aid him in the ministries and he innately understands that, like sheep, many of the members will follow others more quickly than they will the appointed leader.

The one who has the gift of pastor can easily identify with the problems of others and can bring to bear upon those problems the Good News of Christ, the Good Shepherd. He always knows that he, in reality, is an "under-shepherd" of Christ (1 Peter 5:4). In preaching or teaching, he tends to lift up the gospel values that relate to peace, harmony, cohesion, unity, purpose, common goals, and fellowship, the principle being, "united we stand; divided we fall." He tends to be group-oriented rather than person-centered.

When approaching a strayed member, he is likely to think and say, "We have been missing you," or "What can we do to bring you back to us?" He has a keen sense about group dynamics and how individuals best relate to what

the group has to offer. Counting members does not offend him. This way he can keep track of possible losses, a thing shepherds fear greatly. He is also expressively concerned about growth or maturation. Physical and relational growth are indicators of his performance quality, something he takes seriously.

I have noticed that many church school teachers do not have the gift of teaching (more about this later), but do have the gift of pastoring. It would be far better for us to help them understand that what God has placed them there to do as pastors is far more important for the edification of the whole church than transferring biblical information to the members. It is a mistake to design and to develop teaching materials based on secular standards of teaching excellence and turn such over to those who are gifted to pastor, and not to teach. We need to design material that would help people pastor, if that is their gift. Does anyone ever imagine a shepherd teaching a flock? No, but we do vividly imagine such a one caring, encouraging, relating to, managing, and feeding.

There is, however, a related gift of teaching (Eph. 4:10). What if a person has both it and the pastoral gift? Those with the gift of pastoring, and not teaching, but who find themselves in charge of a class on Sunday mornings, spend more time during the week calling, caring, and visiting their class members than they do in preparing lessons. But those with the gift of teaching and not pastoring, may spend all their time preparing the lesson, never making contacts with their class members. This is also characteristic of ordained ministers. Those who have the gift of pastoring will spend most of their time in direct contact with programs and members while the ones with the gift of teaching will spend most of their time studying and preparing for their next (mostly corporate) contact with their parishioners in the classroom.

The Gift of Operations of Power (Miracles)

No particular Greek word can easily and indubitably be translated "miracles" in English. Yet, many translators do this with *dunamis* (see 1 Cor. 12:10, 28). Since, however, the words *dunamis*, *dunameis*, or *dunameon* are often translated "power" or "miracles" and since many of us shy away from the word because of certain abuses and connotations, my preference is to translate this "powerful works," from the combination of *energemata* (operations or workings) and *dunameon* (of powers) in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Whether we translate this as "miracles" or "powerful works," there it stands. And it is not beyond our ability to recognize those who have been used mightily by God to do things that go beyond even the gift of faith. Today's world needs some "powerful works" of the Spirit if we are to find meaning and purpose in the midst of so much chaos.

Scriptural references to such powerful operations are plentiful; a few of the most notable are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Acts 3:1-10; 5:9-11, 12-16; 9:32-35; and 13:8-11. This gift is the ability of some members of the body of Christ to be used of God as special means of powerful works that transcend ordinary and natural methods and ways.

The behavioral characteristics resemble those of the gift of faith, but with a slight difference. The difference is in the lack of intentionality in the use of the gift. A person to whom God has given this power of operation or work does not necessarily know what is happening. He does what he is stirred by the Holy Spirit to do, and something happens.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:6, says that there are varieties of workings (*energemata*) or results of the powerful energy of God. We do not know how and where or when these energies will flow, or how long it takes for a powerful thing

to be accomplished, but history is full of such. This gift is unlike any other. Teachers know when they are teaching, hospitable persons know when they are loving toward strangers, givers know when they are giving, leaders know when they are leading, and so on. But the person with the gift of powerful operations does not and cannot say, "Now I am going to perform a miracle! Get ready, now! Here it comes!" No, all such gifted persons express great surprise over the results of their faithfulness. Some have not lived to see the result of God's powerful working through them, but it happened. A good example is the first martyr, Stephen, and the miraculous (powerful operation) impact of his death upon Saul of Tarsus. The conversion of Saul was indeed a miracle, and so was Augustine's.

We could continue this with lives and events spreading over two thousand years, but it suffices to say, most of the great humanitarian movements and reforms, whether or not religious in motivation, were begun without a grandiose scheme for their future. Instead, as we look back now, we can see that God's power to accomplish good for mankind was obviously given to unsuspecting peoples. Such goes on today, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

The Gift of Prophecy

The Greek word for this is *propheteia* (pro-fay-tee-ah) and indicates a discourse that is divinely inspired, a declaration of the purposes of God related to a current, concrete situation—whether by reproving and correcting the wicked or comforting and admonishing the afflicted. It is the telling forth or forth telling of a truth believed to be revealed by God for the present or future. The prophet is one who divulges, makes known, speaks out for, announces, in-

structs, comforts, confronts, encourages, rebukes, convicts, and stimulates people whom God has chosen to receive a special message.

The scriptural references, for our purposes here, are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Ephesians 4:11-14; Acts 2:14-36; 15:32; 21:9-11; and Romans 12:6. The gift of prophecy is a special ability God gives some members of the body to receive and to communicate either longstanding or recently revealed truths and messages to God's chosen audiences for the purpose of building up the body and its ministries to and through itself to the world.

People with this gift are articulate. They are often capable of discerning the character and motives of people, and are able to identify evil or wrongs. They are willing to experience personal brokenness in order to understand and demonstrate the brokenness in others.

Paul illustrates this with his acceptance of suffering, hardship, and a "thorn" that caused him to experience the sufficient grace of God (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Suffering may not always be the result of evil, but rather a heavy gift of God (see 2 Cor. 4:7-12). Strongly dependent upon Scripture to validate their experiences of prophetic revelation, they tend to be frank, even caustic or tactless when they defend their statements. Often they have the experience of inner weeping as they identify personally with the sins and the evil of the world (see 2 Corinthians 11:16-30).

Normally they have a broad view of God's kingdom and righteousness, covering all of life, not just spiritual concerns. Their focus on rights and wrongs is often judged to be dogmatic and intolerant. Their emphasis is often on making decisions on the basis of what their audience already knows of God rather than the slow process of education and spiritual growth. Their bold, strict standards may hinder intimate and personal relationships. A strong sense of urgency impels them to call for a decision or response to their pro-

nouncements; they are restless as long as decisions and responses are pending. They accept the press of deadlines and are comfortable with time-lines and tables, as well as revelations, found in the Bible. They often feel that play is unimportant, even wrong, until people receive and act upon God's revealed truths. A work-ethic is important to them. They are usually results-oriented rather than process-oriented.

The Gift of Service

The Greek word for "service" is *diakonia* (dee-ak-on-ee-ah) and connotes a special service to God done in a variety of ways; mainly it has to do with menial, ordinary tasks and their extraordinary results. All the scriptural references are too numerous to list, but these are representative: Romans 12:7; Acts 1:17, 25; 20:24; 21:19; 1 Corinthians 12:5; Ephesians 4:12; and 2 Timothy 4:5.

The word *diakonia* is used in a variety of circumstances and ways, and is often translated "ministry" as well as "service." An actual tracing of these uses will uncover its representation from the most menial and basic tasks of serving the needs of fellow humans to the high privilege of serving God directly through prayers of adoration, proclaiming good news about Christ, and priestly acts on behalf of others.

While it is a fact that the term *ministry* later became descriptive of a class and rank of persons, the New Testament use of the term *diakonia* (ministry or service) did not intend anything that related to political or priestly services. The Greeks, during the time of Jesus, recognized it at once as pertaining to self-abasement—waiting tables, serving food and wine, cleaning up after a meal. This is what our Lord brought to the meaning of ministry (*diakonia*)—an honorable and loving service that could not do too much or stoop too low to show esteem for and to service the

needs of other persons (see Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:31; Luke 10:40; 17:8; John 12:2, and Acts 6:1).

The word implies the essence of discipleship as being work and service for the benefit of others, never for holy rank (hierarchy) or status. Ministry, therefore, is not a status or position, but a loving act of caring for the needs of others, whatever those needs are.

The charismatic nature of service or ministry is revealed in the life and acts of a person when there is seemingly no limit to his ability and willingness to serve in the most humbling and inferior position or circumstance (Luke 22:26, 27); serve he must!

The man or woman with the gift of service is keenly alert to detect what needs to be done and is quick to act—never waiting for someone else to “show” first. He tends to feel and display a sense of joy in whatever service is undertaken—menial or profound. He tends not to care about or even notice how menial or unpopular the task or job is. It is a form of worship and ministry to him, regardless of what it is. He displays a physical stamina, almost beyond belief, to fulfill the needs that must be met. He doesn’t usually hesitate to use personal funds to get the work done, so strong is his desire to complete the job. To leave a work undone for God would be missing the mark, a sin.

Some precautions need to be mentioned with regard to the person who serves. This person is likely to go overboard or become too involved in many projects because of the delight and joy he derives from serving. Too, his quick response to service may prompt suspicion of self-advancement and, thus, jealousy from others. For his part, he must beware of being critical of those who do not share his motivation and interest in the task. His insistence on serving rather than on being served may appear as a form of rejection of others’ attempts to express the same gift. And if he senses

insincerity—a “put-up-with-the-job” attitude among his fellow workers—this can create tension.

The essence of the gift is not law or power, not position or status, not rank or authority, not dignity or esteem, but service to the body of Christ. The variety within this one charisma is as wide and numerous as are the needs within the body. When we lay the emphasis on the body of Christ, we guard ourselves against the danger of fanaticism that comes from charisma without some form of institution, and at the same time, when we stress the importance of ministry or service as being a free-grace gift, we shore up against the other danger of being hollow or “white-washed sepulchers,” having the institution without the charisma.

The Gift of Teacher

The Greek term for this is *didaskalia* (dee-dahs-kal-ee-ah) and is a rich word meaning to teach or instruct concerning the things of God and man’s necessary response to God, especially under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Acts 13:1; and James 3:1). This is the extraordinary ability God gives to certain members of the body to expound and make simple God’s offer of redemption through Christ and his will for righteous living.

This does not necessarily mean that the person who has the gift of teaching has the gifts of knowledge and prophecy, although, in many respects and applications, they are similar. It does mean, however, that the gift of teaching will carry a special power to elucidate and illuminate, to clarify and simplify, and to illustrate the role of Jesus Christ as representative of God in man’s redemption. It may be that the charismatic teacher, gifted by God, finds it absolutely necessary to rely on other gifted persons for information, revelations, and divine disclosures. But he can do so with the added extraordinary ability to use what he receives from

them with edifying results, not only for others but also for himself (Heb. 5:12; James 3:1).

Much is being said and written today about Christian education. A multitude of institutions are devoted to teaching the Bible, religion, church history, doctrine, and theology. Because this is true, I have a deep concern that we recognize a growing problem.

There is no question about it—the early Christians slipped quickly into and became obsessed with a teaching ministry that was based on secular models. The charismatic model or mode of teaching ministry was almost, if not totally, abandoned. The pastoral Epistles reveal how quickly and how far the early church moved away from the reliance upon the Holy Spirit for instruction, correction, and sustenance, as Paul insisted and maintained to the end. This has continued throughout history, even to the present.

It grieves me to learn how many seminarians become disenchanted upon discovering that the seminary is not a community of faith but that it is seemingly obsessed with maintaining academic integrity as one department competes with other departments, all at the costly expense of offering the students little or no spiritual formation and development. Most students who survive with a sense of the "Holy Other" (a sensitivity to the presence of the Holy Spirit) are those who serve student pastorates where practical and spiritual problems constantly drive them to their knees before God for strength and guidance. Seminarians who are not blessed with the practicum of the parish while being educated tend to model their ministry after the classroom professor and wonder why the community of faith does not respond as the early New Testament peoples did to the prophets and teachers!

An associated problem is our method of training leaders and teachers in the local church. In all too many cases, no attempt is made to ensure that those we recruit and

train for leadership are experienced Christians—"born again" (John 3:3), "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), "transformed" (Rom. 12:2). Even the literature we turn over to our local leaders bears little testimony to the importance of such experiences of faith. And we wonder why churches are declining in influence, why more people leave than are received as members, and why the church is accused of not offering the "real spiritual part of religion." Teaching is the key, but only a charismatic kind.

Charismatic teachers differ from those modeled after secular standards. While they place a premium on accuracy of details, the meaning of words and phrases, they radiate with an enthusiastic devotion to Christ as Lord and Savior. They delight in reading the Bible and discover the Bible to be full of relevant messages for today. They are more inclined to search out the *meaning* of Scripture than memorize verses, events, names, and titles of books. Yet, they consider memorization of verses, events, names, and book titles indispensable aids toward grasping the meaning.

These teachers, gifted with the Holy Spirit, will not overlook the hard work of being accurate in details, correct in the use of words, and ardent in research. Yet they will balance these with appropriate personal attention to other needs of the students. To them, teaching is more than the transmission or communication of information; it carries a relational feature. Teaching, to them, becomes more than a methodology, technique, or event; it is an identification and involvement with people who are in process toward a new being in Christ. They do not find it easy simply to "deliver" a lesson to those before them in a classroom situation while having no relations with them at other times. The charismatic quality of *didaskalia* creates the motivation to be in partnership with the learners. It is a mutually benefiting relationship that carries the principle: "teaching, I am taught."

In addition to being "relational" in their teaching roles, these gifted people also delight in researching meticulous details. They tend to verbalize their feelings as well as act them out; are keenly interested in validating new information by proven systems of verification; and they have an insatiable love for books, magazines, and other reading materials. Slow to abandon well-thought-out traditional views and ways which have been effective in building up the body of Christ, they will not accept so-called "propositional truths," "scriptural accuracies," and "doctrinal exactitudes" without empirical proofs with practical value for today's living. This simply means that charismatic teachers are not interested in sifting out historical facts and fiction, but rather in finding meaning and purpose for living. The better term to describe New Testament teaching is discipling (Matt. 28:19).

The Gift of Tongues

This spiritual gift is described by the word *glōssolalia* which combines two words: *lalia*, signifying any utterance of sound, whether intelligent or unintelligent, and *glōssa*, meaning literally "tongue," but implying "language." *Glossalalia* nowhere appears in the New Testament; usually the Greek word translated "tongue(s)," is *glōssa*.

Scriptural references are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 13:1, 14:4, 5, 22; Mark 16:17; Acts 2:2-13; 10:44-46; and 19:1-7. Some Bible students also include Romans 8:26, 27 and Ephesians 6:18 as references to speaking in tongues.

Tongues is the special ability or power God gives to some members of the body to communicate in a way that may or may not resemble a known or acceptable language for the purpose of transcending the limitations of normal speech to minister to, for, and through the body of Christ.

To be sure, this has been one of the most troublesome

aspects of charismatism, beginning early in Christian history. I do not care to enter into the debate over the gift of tongues. There are more books and pamphlets on the subject than the human family deserves, and I do not intend to add another one. We cannot, however, overlook the existence of this charism in the New Testament and its occurrence throughout history, especially since it seems that the greatest volume of interest in the subject prevails today. I simply want to point out what I have discovered as the universal characteristics of those who believe in tongues, even if they are not necessarily speakers, and of those who speak in tongues in private prayer and/or in the assembly (church).

These grace-gifted people have a very real and active prayer life, which they rarely neglect. They are inclined to pray aloud, usually beginning their prayers in their own language and moving into sounds that free up the thoughts bound by the limits of syntax and word definitions. They have a keen inclination, even a conviction, that there is much more to praying than saying the conditioned and learned words and phrases. When they pray or speak or sing in tongues, there is no stammering or sighing, neither standardized exclamations of joy nor a mumbling of gibberish. The flow is almost effortless. The genuine use of this mode of speaking is personalistic and individualistic, not copied from or set by the pattern of others. Those who are true recipients of this gift do not go into a trance or become delirious, and are not normally given to ecstasy or highly emotional aberrations. They are never out of control of their senses and feelings nor do they feel "delivered" into the control of the Holy Spirit. They are always in control of their participation.

They would not describe this as the Spirit praying or speaking for or through them. Rather, to them this is the awe-inspiring experience of having the ability to participate

fully "in the Spirit" so that a special ministry may be performed.

They do not always—perhaps rarely—know the content of what is being communicated, but they do know the joy of not being restricted by a learned language and thought pattern. They have a special sense of being in touch with God. Eventually these people discover a pattern of sounds which becomes for them a personal prayer language. Most of them so gifted are not particularly curious about what they are praying or saying—they simply feel a great sense of trust in the act of praying.

Many of those with this gift claim that when they initially experienced it, it was the most transforming and enlightening happening in their relationship to God. Eventually, however, as they matured, they became aware of the gift's being a pointer to and support of a more meaningful ministry. The gift has a twofold dimension: (1) to edify or build up the person with the gift so that (2) he or she may be inspired, directed, and strengthened to serve others effectively. Often, the gift when exercised gives a sense of direction and a release from unnecessary pressures. People feel lifted from a conditioned sense of low self-esteem to that of divinely inspired personal value and destiny. Many find deliverance from psychological and emotional problems, even to the extent of being healed of related physical illnesses, and some feel their sense of psychological balance restored so that they regain a confidence about what they can and cannot do.

In their relations with others, many find the gift an aid to loving. Their religious convictions are strengthened with its practice and their religious life is revitalized as a direct result of using the gift. They usually find that church services and the sacraments take on a new meaning, the Bible "comes to life," and prayer becomes more a means of relating than petitioning. Most of the faithful uses of this gift

give witness to a particular quality and quantity of joy, even in the midst of difficulties.

As with all of the gifts, there is a danger of "gift-projection," that is, thinking and declaring that all Christians should have this one gift. Some recipients tend to make others feel inferior or disobedient if they do not have the gift. To be sure, some appear to be out of control in the use of the tongue gift though they claim that the Holy Spirit is doing the speaking. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that the Holy Spirit does the speaking. In every case it says, "And *they* spoke in tongues."

Whenever tongues becomes divisive in the body of Christ, the burden rests on the practicer. All gifts are to edify, never to divide and tear down (Eph. 4:12-14). To pray to receive this gift is to abuse the gift. Charismata are free-favors given by God, from his own choosing. A charism sought after and petitioned for and earned through fervent prayers is no longer a free gift; it is no longer a charism.

This gift is abused when anyone thinks or promotes the idea that through it a possessor will acquire eternal bliss, whenever one uses it in public without an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27, 28), whenever a person praying in public begins in his own tongue and then prays only in his personal prayer language (1 Cor. 14:15), whenever he believes and teaches that it is the panacea for all problems and the answer to all mysteries, and whenever he separates himself from those who do not have the gift or leaves a church because this gift is not being demonstrated publicly.

The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

It is obviously essential that this gift be considered in relation to the preceding one. Without the presence of the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation would be meaningless and useless. The Greek word here is *diemeneuō* (dee-

er-main-yoo-o) and it means to make the meaning clear, to explain the message, to expound upon the meaning, to translate into another language or vernacular for understanding.

Scriptural references for this gift are 1 Corinthians 12:30 and 14:5, 13, and 27. Interpretation is not only a gift of ministry for the unfolding of a mystery hidden in a foreign or unknown language, but is also a vital work (ministry) related to the expounding of the good news of Christ's coming. An example of the latter is found in Luke 24:27, which describes how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures to the two disciples on the Emmaus road. Without question, the church has always needed this kind of clear interpretation. The gospel is too often stretched and twisted beyond recognition today. By their political schemes and theological systems and scientific principles, men take all sorts of undue liberties with the message of God's love in Christ for the world. Only sound interpretation will deliver the church from error.

Having said that, I do not confuse the normal, everyday meaning of "interpretation" with that peculiar gift of *diermeneuō*. This is the ability God gives some members of the body to hear, understand, and translate God's intended messages spoken in tongues so that the entire body can be built up and further equipped to serve as a redemptive agent for all people.

I would note these prominent characteristics of those who have the gift of interpretation. They appear to have received a meaning through a message spoken in an unknown tongue; their interpretation often coincides with rather familiar biblical passages. Often, however, they may feel they have heard no distinct message; thus, they tend to remain quiet or aloof, especially if they suspect that their gift or the speaker's gift may not be "operating." Contrasted to the

speakers, these people tend to be more deliberative and meditative.

The Gift of Wisdom

This word, translated from the Greek *sophia* (so-fee-ah), means a practical application of knowledge (divine and natural) in specific and concrete situations that call for the grace (*charis*) or favor of God.

Related references are 1 Corinthians 12:8; Matthew 12:42; Acts 6:3, 10; 7:10; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; and 2 Peter 3:15. These show various applications of intelligence on a wide range of subjects. This gift is the ability God gives to some Christians to speak, utter, write, and/or paint words that bring insight, applying God's eternal and lofty truths to the daily living and ministering of the members.

Characteristically these gifted persons appear to have an uncanny ability to make statements which, at first, may not make sense, but get to the heart of a need. An example of this is Luther's oft-repeated phrase, "Love God and do as you please." Many times, these people do not realize the wisdom of their statements but feel compelled to speak their mind, often in spite of possible challenges or charges of being simple. They often have a way of saying something that brings to light the "hidden" but obvious truth. It simply "rings true."

Often the charismatically wise person, to the chagrin of others, asks practical questions or offers suggestions related to God's will, God's kingdom, and God's glory, which almost embarrass the rest of us with their sting of realism. An example of this is when our Lord wrote something in the sand as the adulteress was being subjected to public scrutiny (John 8:3-11). What he wrote we do not know, but it was enough to bring the accusers to the poignant

reality of their own sins. They had a knowledge of the broader scope of God's laws and will, but could not see the particulars that related to them. Another example of one being able to tie broad and general knowledge of God's purposes to concrete realities was Paul's practical advice to sailors during a raging storm (Acts 27).

This gifted person has the ability not only to make a practical application of knowledge (*gnōsis*) given him by God or shared with him by another person, to concrete, specific situations. He is also able to glorify seemingly insignificant and natural situations by lifting them to the heights of divine reality. He can see, pronounce, and explain the presence of God in the most mundane and ordinary things and events. Simply put, his head is not so much in the clouds of theological mysteries that he cannot see God in the simple things in life. He comes across as a very practical person. For him, if God isn't in a marriage, a parent-child relationship, a business deal, "fun" things—and all the problems and joys related to these—then he isn't in heaven either! He does not see God as a "religious" being, but a participator in the rough and tumble of life, bringing repair, redemption, joy, love, and hope through and with the manifestation of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

9

Special Gifts

Singleness, Exorcism, Missionary, Witnessing, Music

WITH THE TWENTY-TWO GIFTS described in the foregoing chapters, we have considered all of those that are usually encountered in the literature of spiritual gifts. However, as I have stated, the list of gifts could go on almost interminably. In time, other gifts will perhaps be recognized as charismata and there are five which I particularly want to comment upon here.

The Gift of Singleness

My reason for including this among the gifts is twofold. Paul implies that the *charis* of God is a precondition for meaningful, productive singleness (1 Cor. 7:7), and the single person is free from the concerns of marriage so he or she may serve the Lord fully.

This gift, singleness, comes from the Greek word *agamos* (ag-a-mos) which means "to be unmarried, unattached, unbound." The scriptural base is found in 1 Cor. 7:32–35 and also can be seen by implication in verse 7.

This gifted one often feels inclined to look for those in need or distress if none is readily at hand. A severe abuse of this gift ought to be mentioned. When a person is not acting in Christ with his gift of mercy, when there is no one around in need of help and the gifted person cannot find anyone, he or she may create a problem in order to be on hand to give help. Many people play this game of "enemy-then-savior" out of a misuse of the gift. All gifts have their misuses and abuses, as well as counterfeits.

The person with the gift of mercy is often what we consider "emotional," easily given to expressing sympathy by groaning or crying when confronted with another in pain. Persons with this gift can be easily identified if you watch television dramas with them. The misery portrayed on the screen will affect them visibly. When they hear stories of sorrow and suffering from the pulpit, they are quick to rally to any attempt to relieve the misery. Because they want to know when the distress is relieved, many of them enter professions that are directly related to the relief of suffering. Their delight is in relieving and being relieved of pain. In this respect, then, what happens between the helped and the helper is not merely a transfer of aid from one person to another in need, but a mutual fulfillment and enrichment of the participants in the exchange.

The Gifts

The Gift of Pastor

THE GREEK WORD for "pastor," *poimen*, (poi-mayn) means "shepherd." The chief scriptural references are Ephesians 4:11; John 10:1-8; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; and 1 Peter 5:1-5. The word means to protect, to oversee, to care for, to manage, to assemble, to feed. These can be taken literally or figuratively. It is a concept heavily used in the Old and New Testaments, and a very important one.

This is not one of the offices for ministry we find in the New Testament, such as deacon, elder, presbyter, and bishop. It is a gift for ministry that anyone is eligible to receive. While persons in certain offices we normally associate with ministry may be given this gift of pastoring, the gift itself is certainly not restricted to those offices.

The behavioral characteristics of the gift of pastor would, no doubt, be akin to the responsibilities of a herdsman (Old Testament) or a shepherd (New Testament). A pastor would be one able to carry a concern for a large group of members



of the body of Christ. We could define the spiritual gift as the ability God has given to various members of the body of Christ to oversee, care for, and spiritually develop a large group of members, especially over a long period of time.

This person has the drive and capacity to shoulder concern for many people at one time. He tends to be concerned about spiritual and physical needs that relate to maturation and participation in the body of Christ. He is quick to respond to a call for help, but also seeks to get others involved in the helping. Having a keen awareness of healthy and enhancing relations between people, he is often paternalistic and nurturing in his relationships. He knows that problems are going to occur and plans ahead how these may be solved. If problems do not come to his attention, he tends to go looking for them. He experiences a joy in the management of ministries for a group of people and prefers group dynamics and programs over a one-to-one ministry. He easily spots "bellwether" people (sheep) who can aid him in the ministries and he innately understands that, like sheep, many of the members will follow others more quickly than they will the appointed leader.

The one who has the gift of pastor can easily identify with the problems of others and can bring to bear upon those problems the Good News of Christ, the Good Shepherd. He always knows that he, in reality, is an "under-shepherd" of Christ (1 Peter 5:4). In preaching or teaching, he tends to lift up the gospel values that relate to peace, harmony, cohesion, unity, purpose, common goals, and fellowship, the principle being, "united we stand; divided we fall." He tends to be group-oriented rather than person-centered.

When approaching a strayed member, he is likely to think and say, "We have been missing you," or "What can we do to bring you back to us?" He has a keen sense about group dynamics and how individuals best relate to what

the group has to offer. Counting members does not offend him. This way he can keep track of possible losses, a thing shepherds fear greatly. He is also expressively concerned about growth or maturation. Physical and relational growth are indicators of his performance quality, something he takes seriously.

I have noticed that many church school teachers do not have the gift of teaching (more about this later), but do have the gift of pastoring. It would be far better for us to help them understand that what God has placed them there to do as pastors is far more important for the edification of the whole church than transferring biblical information to the members. It is a mistake to design and to develop teaching materials based on secular standards of teaching excellence and turn such over to those who are gifted to pastor, and not to teach. We need to design material that would help people pastor, if that is their gift. Does anyone ever imagine a shepherd teaching a flock? No, but we do vividly imagine such a one caring, encouraging, relating to, managing, and feeding.

There is, however, a related gift of teaching (Eph. 4:10). What if a person has both it and the pastoral gift? Those with the gift of pastoring, and not teaching, but who find themselves in charge of a class on Sunday mornings, spend more time during the week calling, caring, and visiting their class members than they do in preparing lessons. But those with the gift of teaching and not pastoring, may spend all their time preparing the lesson, never making contacts with their class members. This is also characteristic of ordained ministers. Those who have the gift of pastoring will spend most of their time in direct contact with programs and members while the ones with the gift of teaching will spend most of their time studying and preparing for their next (mostly corporate) contact with their parishioners in the classroom.

The Gift of Operations of Power (Miracles)

No particular Greek word can easily and indubitably be translated "miracles" in English. Yet, many translators do this with *dunamis* (see 1 Cor. 12:10, 28). Since, however, the words *dunamis*, *dunameis*, or *dunameon* are often translated "power" or "miracles" and since many of us shy away from the word because of certain abuses and connotations, my preference is to translate this "powerful works," from the combination of *energemata* (operations or workings) and *dunameon* (of powers) in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Whether we translate this as "miracles" or "powerful works," there it stands. And it is not beyond our ability to recognize those who have been used mightily by God to do things that go beyond even the gift of faith. Today's world needs some "powerful works" of the Spirit if we are to find meaning and purpose in the midst of so much chaos.

Scriptural references to such powerful operations are plentiful; a few of the most notable are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Acts 3:1-10; 5:9-11, 12-16; 9:32-35; and 13:8-11. This gift is the ability of some members of the body of Christ to be used of God as special means of powerful works that transcend ordinary and natural methods and ways.

The behavioral characteristics resemble those of the gift of faith, but with a slight difference. The difference is in the lack of intentionality in the use of the gift. A person to whom God has given this power of operation or work does not necessarily know what is happening. He does what he is stirred by the Holy Spirit to do, and something happens.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:6, says that there are varieties of workings (*energemata*) or results of the powerful energy of God. We do not know how and where or when these energies will flow, or how long it takes for a powerful thing

to be accomplished, but history is full of such. This gift is unlike any other. Teachers know when they are teaching, hospitable persons know when they are loving toward strangers, givers know when they are giving, leaders know when they are leading, and so on. But the person with the gift of powerful operations does not and cannot say, "Now I am going to perform a miracle! Get ready, now! Here it comes!" No, all such gifted persons express great surprise over the results of their faithfulness. Some have not lived to see the result of God's powerful working through them, but it happened. A good example is the first martyr, Stephen, and the miraculous (powerful operation) impact of his death upon Saul of Tarsus. The conversion of Saul was indeed a miracle, and so was Augustine's.

We could continue this with lives and events spreading over two thousand years, but it suffices to say, most of the great humanitarian movements and reforms, whether or not religious in motivation, were begun without a grandiose scheme for their future. Instead, as we look back now, we can see that God's power to accomplish good for mankind was obviously given to unsuspecting peoples. Such goes on today, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

The Gift of Prophecy

The Greek word for this is *propheteia* (pro-fay-tee-ah) and indicates a discourse that is divinely inspired, a declaration of the purposes of God related to a current, concrete situation—whether by reproving and correcting the wicked or comforting and admonishing the afflicted. It is the telling forth or forth telling of a truth believed to be revealed by God for the present or future. The prophet is one who divulges, makes known, speaks out for, announces, in-

structs, comforts, confronts, encourages, rebukes, convicts, and stimulates people whom God has chosen to receive a special message.

The scriptural references, for our purposes here, are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Ephesians 4:11–14; Acts 2:14–36; 15:32; 21:9–11; and Romans 12:6. The gift of prophecy is a special ability God gives some members of the body to receive and to communicate either longstanding or recently revealed truths and messages to God's chosen audiences for the purpose of building up the body and its ministries to and through itself to the world.

People with this gift are articulate. They are often capable of discerning the character and motives of people, and are able to identify evil or wrongs. They are willing to experience personal brokenness in order to understand and demonstrate the brokenness in others.

Paul illustrates this with his acceptance of suffering, hardship, and a "thorn" that caused him to experience the sufficient grace of God (2 Cor. 12:7–9). Suffering may not always be the result of evil, but rather a heavy gift of God (see 2 Cor. 4:7–12). Strongly dependent upon Scripture to validate their experiences of prophetic revelation, they tend to be frank, even caustic or tactless when they defend their statements. Often they have the experience of inner weeping as they identify personally with the sins and the evil of the world (see 2 Corinthians 11:16–30).

Normally they have a broad view of God's kingdom and righteousness, covering all of life, not just spiritual concerns. Their focus on rights and wrongs is often judged to be dogmatic and intolerant. Their emphasis is often on making decisions on the basis of what their audience already knows of God rather than the slow process of education and spiritual growth. Their bold, strict standards may hinder intimate and personal relationships. A strong sense of urgency impels them to call for a decision or response to their pro-

nouncements; they are restless as long as decisions and responses are pending. They accept the press of deadlines and are comfortable with time-lines and tables, as well as revelations, found in the Bible. They often feel that play is unimportant, even wrong, until people receive and act upon God's revealed truths. A work-ethic is important to them. They are usually results-oriented rather than process-oriented.

The Gift of Service

The Greek word for "service" is *diakonia* (dee-ak-on-ee-ah) and connotes a special service to God done in a variety of ways; mainly it has to do with menial, ordinary tasks and their extraordinary results. All the scriptural references are too numerous to list, but these are representative: Romans 12:7; Acts 1:17, 25; 20:24; 21:19; 1 Corinthians 12:5; Ephesians 4:12; and 2 Timothy 4:5.

The word *diakonia* is used in a variety of circumstances and ways, and is often translated "ministry" as well as "service." An actual tracing of these uses will uncover its representation from the most menial and basic tasks of serving the needs of fellow humans to the high privilege of serving God directly through prayers of adoration, proclaiming good news about Christ, and priestly acts on behalf of others.

While it is a fact that the term *ministry* later became descriptive of a class and rank of persons, the New Testament use of the term *diakonia* (ministry or service) did not intend anything that related to political or priestly services. The Greeks, during the time of Jesus, recognized it at once as pertaining to self-abasement—waiting tables, serving food and wine, cleaning up after a meal. This is what our Lord brought to the meaning of ministry (*diakonia*)—an honorable and loving service that could not do too much or stoop too low to show esteem for and to service the

needs of other persons (see Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:31; Luke 10:40; 17:8; John 12:2, and Acts 6:1).

The word implies the essence of discipleship as being work and service for the benefit of others, never for holy rank (hierarchy) or status. Ministry, therefore, is not a status or position, but a loving act of caring for the needs of others, whatever those needs are.

The charismatic nature of service or ministry is revealed in the life and acts of a person when there is seemingly no limit to his ability and willingness to serve in the most humbling and inferior position or circumstance (Luke 22:26, 27); serve he must!

The man or woman with the gift of service is keenly alert to detect what needs to be done and is quick to act—never waiting for someone else to “show” first. He tends to feel and display a sense of joy in whatever service is undertaken—menial or profound. He tends not to care about or even notice how menial or unpopular the task or job is. It is a form of worship and ministry to him, regardless of what it is. He displays a physical stamina, almost beyond belief, to fulfill the needs that must be met. He doesn’t usually hesitate to use personal funds to get the work done, so strong is his desire to complete the job. To leave a work undone for God would be missing the mark, a sin.

Some precautions need to be mentioned with regard to the person who serves. This person is likely to go overboard or become too involved in many projects because of the delight and joy he derives from serving. Too, his quick response to service may prompt suspicion of self-advancement and, thus, jealousy from others. For his part, he must beware of being critical of those who do not share his motivation and interest in the task. His insistence on serving rather than on being served may appear as a form of rejection of others’ attempts to express the same gift. And if he senses

insincerity—a “put-up-with-the-job” attitude among his fellow workers—this can create tension.

The essence of the gift is not law or power, not position or status, not rank or authority, not dignity or esteem, but service to the body of Christ. The variety within this one charisma is as wide and numerous as are the needs within the body. When we lay the emphasis on the body of Christ, we guard ourselves against the danger of fanaticism that comes from charisma without some form of institution; and at the same time, when we stress the importance of ministry or service as being a free-grace gift, we shore up against the other danger of being hollow or “white-washed sepulchers,” having the institution without the charisma.

The Gift of Teacher

The Greek term for this is *didaskalia* (dee-dahs-kal-ee-ah) and is a rich word meaning to teach or instruct concerning the things of God and man’s necessary response to God, especially under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Acts 13:1; and James 3:1). This is the extraordinary ability God gives to certain members of the body to expound and make simple God’s offer of redemption through Christ and his will for righteous living.

This does not necessarily mean that the person who has the gift of teaching has the gifts of knowledge and prophecy, although, in many respects and applications, they are similar. It does mean, however, that the gift of teaching will carry a special power to elucidate and illuminate, to clarify and simplify, and to illustrate the role of Jesus Christ as representative of God in man’s redemption. It may be that the charismatic teacher, gifted by God, finds it absolutely necessary to rely on other gifted persons for information, revelations, and divine disclosures. But he can do so with the added extraordinary ability to use what he receives from

them with edifying results, not only for others but also for himself (Heb. 5:12; James 3:1).

Much is being said and written today about Christian education. A multitude of institutions are devoted to teaching the Bible, religion, church history, doctrine, and theology. Because this is true, I have a deep concern that we recognize a growing problem.

There is no question about it—the early Christians slipped quickly into and became obsessed with a teaching ministry that was based on secular models. The charismatic model or mode of teaching ministry was almost, if not totally, abandoned. The pastoral Epistles reveal how quickly and how far the early church moved away from the reliance upon the Holy Spirit for instruction, correction, and sustenance, as Paul insisted and maintained to the end. This has continued throughout history, even to the present.

It grieves me to learn how many seminarians become disenchanted upon discovering that the seminary is not a community of faith but that it is seemingly obsessed with maintaining academic integrity as one department competes with other departments, all at the costly expense of offering the students little or no spiritual formation and development. Most students who survive with a sense of the "Holy Other" (a sensitivity to the presence of the Holy Spirit) are those who serve student pastorates where practical and spiritual problems constantly drive them to their knees before God for strength and guidance. Seminarians who are not blessed with the practicum of the parish while being educated tend to model their ministry after the classroom professor and wonder why the community of faith does not respond as the early New Testament peoples did to the prophets and teachers!

An associated problem is our method of training leaders and teachers in the local church. In all too many cases, no attempt is made to ensure that those we recruit and

train for leadership are experienced Christians—"born again" (John 3:3), "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), "transformed" (Rom. 12:2). Even the literature we turn over to our local leaders bears little testimony to the importance of such experiences of faith. And we wonder why churches are declining in influence, why more people leave than are received as members, and why the church is accused of not offering the "real spiritual part of religion." Teaching is the key, but only a charismatic kind.

Charismatic teachers differ from those modeled after secular standards. While they place a premium on accuracy of details, the meaning of words and phrases, they radiate with an enthusiastic devotion to Christ as Lord and Savior. They delight in reading the Bible and discover the Bible to be full of relevant messages for today. They are more inclined to search out the *meaning* of Scripture than memorize verses, events, names, and titles of books. Yet, they consider memorization of verses, events, names, and book titles indispensable aids toward grasping the meaning.

These teachers, gifted with the Holy Spirit, will not overlook the hard work of being accurate in details, correct in the use of words, and ardent in research. Yet they will balance these with appropriate personal attention to other needs of the students. To them, teaching is more than the transmission or communication of information; it carries a relational feature. Teaching, to them, becomes more than a methodology, technique, or event; it is an identification and involvement with people who are in process toward a new being in Christ. They do not find it easy simply to "deliver" a lesson to those before them in a classroom situation while having no relations with them at other times. The charismatic quality of *didaskalia* creates the motivation to be in partnership with the learners. It is a mutually benefiting relationship that carries the principle: "teaching, I am taught."

In addition to being "relational" in their teaching roles, these gifted people also delight in researching meticulous details. They tend to verbalize their feelings as well as act them out; are keenly interested in validating new information by proven systems of verification; and they have an insatiable love for books, magazines, and other reading materials. Slow to abandon well-thought-out traditional views and ways which have been effective in building up the body of Christ, they will not accept so-called "propositional truths," "scriptural accuracies," and "doctrinal exactitudes" without empirical proofs with practical value for today's living. This simply means that charismatic teachers are not interested in sifting out historical facts and fiction, but rather in finding meaning and purpose for living. The better term to describe New Testament teaching is discipling (Matt. 28:19).

The Gift of Tongues

This spiritual gift is described by the word *glōssolalia* which combines two words: *lalia*, signifying any utterance of sound, whether intelligent or unintelligent, and *glōssa*, meaning literally "tongue," but implying "language." *Glossolalia* nowhere appears in the New Testament; usually the Greek word translated "tongue(s)," is *glōssa*.

Scriptural references are 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 13:1; 14:4, 5, 22; Mark 16:17; Acts 2:2-13; 10:44-46; and 19:1-7. Some Bible students also include Romans 8:26, 27 and Ephesians 6:18 as references to speaking in tongues.

Tongues is the special ability or power God gives to some members of the body to communicate in a way that may or may not resemble a known or acceptable language for the purpose of transcending the limitations of normal speech to minister to, for, and through the body of Christ.

To be sure, this has been one of the most troublesome

aspects of charismatism, beginning early in Christian history. I do not care to enter into the debate over the gift of tongues. There are more books and pamphlets on the subject than the human family deserves, and I do not intend to add another one. We cannot, however, overlook the existence of this charism in the New Testament and its occurrence throughout history, especially since it seems that the greatest volume of interest in the subject prevails today. I simply want to point out what I have discovered as the universal characteristics of those who believe in tongues, even if they are not necessarily speakers, and of those who speak in tongues in private prayer and/or in the assembly (church).

These grace-gifted people have a very real and active prayer life, which they rarely neglect. They are inclined to pray aloud, usually beginning their prayers in their own language and moving into sounds that free up the thoughts bound by the limits of syntax and word definitions. They have a keen inclination, even a conviction, that there is much more to praying than saying the conditioned and learned words and phrases. When they pray or speak or sing in tongues, there is no stammering or sighing, neither standardized exclamations of joy nor a mumbling of gibberish. The flow is almost effortless. The genuine use of this mode of speaking is personalistic and individualistic, not copied from or set by the pattern of others. Those who are true recipients of this gift do not go into a trance or become delirious, and are not normally given to ecstasy or highly emotional aberrations. They are never out of control of their senses and feelings nor do they feel "delivered" into the control of the Holy Spirit. They are always in control of their participation.

They would not describe this as the Spirit praying or speaking for or through them. Rather, to them this is the awe-inspiring experience of having the ability to participate

fully "in the Spirit" so that a special ministry may be performed.

They do not always—perhaps rarely—know the content of what is being communicated, but they do know the joy of not being restricted by a learned language and thought pattern. They have a special sense of being in touch with God. Eventually these people discover a pattern of sounds which becomes for them a personal prayer language. Most of them so gifted are not particularly curious about what they are praying or saying—they simply feel a great sense of trust in the act of praying.

Many of those with this gift claim that when they initially experienced it, it was the most transforming and enlightening happening in their relationship to God. Eventually, however, as they matured, they became aware of the gift's being a pointer to and support of a more meaningful ministry. The gift has a twofold dimension: (1) to edify or build up the person with the gift so that (2) he or she may be inspired, directed, and strengthened to serve others effectively. Often, the gift when exercised gives a sense of direction and a release from unnecessary pressures. People feel lifted from a conditioned sense of low self-esteem to that of divinely inspired personal value and destiny. Many find deliverance from psychological and emotional problems, even to the extent of being healed of related physical illnesses, and some feel their sense of psychological balance restored so that they regain a confidence about what they can and cannot do.

In their relations with others, many find the gift an aid to loving. Their religious convictions are strengthened with its practice and their religious life is revitalized as a direct result of using the gift. They usually find that church services and the sacraments take on a new meaning, the Bible "comes to life," and prayer becomes more a means of relating than petitioning. Most of the faithful uses of this gift

give witness to a particular quality and quantity of joy, even in the midst of difficulties.

As with all of the gifts, there is a danger of "gift-projection," that is, thinking and declaring that all Christians should have this one gift. Some recipients tend to make others feel inferior or disobedient if they do not have the gift. To be sure, some appear to be out of control in the use of the tongue gift though they claim that the Holy Spirit is doing the speaking. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that the Holy Spirit does the speaking. In every case it says, "And *they* spoke in tongues."

Whenever tongues becomes divisive in the body of Christ, the burden rests on the practitioner. All gifts are to edify, never to divide and tear down (Eph. 4:12-14). To pray to receive this gift is to abuse the gift. Charismata are free-favors given by God, from his own choosing. A charism sought after and petitioned for and earned through fervent prayers is no longer a free gift; it is no longer a charism.

This gift is abused when anyone thinks or promotes the idea that through it a possessor will acquire eternal bliss, whenever one uses it in public without an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27, 28), whenever a person praying in public begins in his own tongue and then prays only in his personal prayer language (1 Cor. 14:15), whenever he believes and teaches that it is the panacea for all problems and the answer to all mysteries, and whenever he separates himself from those who do not have the gift or leaves a church because this gift is not being demonstrated publicly.

The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

It is obviously essential that this gift be considered in relation to the preceding one. Without the presence of the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation would be meaningless and useless. The Greek word here is *diemeneuō* (dee-

er-main-yoo-o) and it means to make the meaning clear, to explain the message, to expound upon the meaning, to translate into another language or vernacular for understanding.

Scriptural references for this gift are 1 Corinthians 12:30 and 14:5, 13, and 27. Interpretation is not only a gift of ministry for the unfolding of a mystery hidden in a foreign or unknown language, but is also a vital work (ministry) related to the expounding of the good news of Christ's coming. An example of the latter is found in Luke 24:27, which describes how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures to the two disciples on the Emmaus road. Without question, the church has always needed this kind of clear interpretation. The gospel is too often stretched and twisted beyond recognition today. By their political schemes and theological systems and scientific principles, men take all sorts of undue liberties with the message of God's love in Christ for the world. Only sound interpretation will deliver the church from error.

Having said that, I do not confuse the normal, everyday meaning of "interpretation" with that peculiar gift of *diermeneuō*. This is the ability God gives some members of the body to hear, understand, and translate God's intended messages spoken in tongues so that the entire body can be built up and further equipped to serve as a redemptive agent for all people.

I would note these prominent characteristics of those who have the gift of interpretation. They appear to have received a meaning through a message spoken in an unknown tongue; their interpretation often coincides with rather familiar biblical passages. Often, however, they may feel they have heard no distinct message; thus, they tend to remain quiet or aloof, especially if they suspect that their gift or the speaker's gift may not be "operating." Contrasted to the

speakers, these people tend to be more deliberative and meditative.

The Gift of Wisdom

This word, translated from the Greek *sophia* (so-fee-ah), means a practical application of knowledge (divine and natural) in specific and concrete situations that call for the grace (*charis*) or favor of God.

Related references are 1 Corinthians 12:8; Matthew 12:42; Acts 6:3, 10; 7:10; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; and 2 Peter 3:15. These show various applications of intelligence on a wide range of subjects. This gift is the ability God gives to some Christians to speak, utter, write, and/or paint words that bring insight, applying God's eternal and lofty truths to the daily living and ministering of the members.

Characteristically these gifted persons appear to have an uncanny ability to make statements which, at first, may not make sense, but get to the heart of a need. An example of this is Luther's oft-repeated phrase, "Love God and do as you please." Many times, these people do not realize the wisdom of their statements but feel compelled to speak their mind, often in spite of possible challenges or charges of being simple. They often have a way of saying something that brings to light the "hidden" but obvious truth. It simply "rings true."

Often the charismatically wise person, to the chagrin of others, asks practical questions or offers suggestions related to God's will, God's kingdom, and God's glory, which almost embarrass the rest of us with their sting of realism. An example of this is when our Lord wrote something in the sand as the adulteress was being subjected to public scrutiny (John 8:3-11). What he wrote we do not know, but it was enough to bring the accusers to the poignant

reality of their own sins. They had a knowledge of the broader scope of God's laws and will, but could not see the particulars that related to them. Another example of one being able to tie broad and general knowledge of God's purposes to concrete realities was Paul's practical advice to sailors during a raging storm (Acts 27).

This gifted person has the ability not only to make a practical application of knowledge (*gnōsis*) given him by God or shared with him by another person, to concrete, specific situations. He is also able to glorify seemingly insignificant and natural situations by lifting them to the heights of divine reality. He can see, pronounce, and explain the presence of God in the most mundane and ordinary things and events. Simply put, his head is not so much in the clouds of theological mysteries that he cannot see God in the simple things in life. He comes across as a very practical person. For him, if God isn't in a marriage, a parent-child relationship, a business deal, "fun" things—and all the problems and joys related to these—then he isn't in heaven either! He does not see God as a "religious" being, but a participator in the rough and tumble of life, bringing repair, redemption, joy, love, and hope through and with the manifestation of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

9

Special Gifts

Singleness, Exorcism, Missionary, Witnessing, Music

WITH THE TWENTY-TWO GIFTS described in the foregoing chapters, we have considered all of those that are usually encountered in the literature of spiritual gifts. However, as I have stated, the list of gifts could go on almost interminably. In time, other gifts will perhaps be recognized as charismata and there are five which I particularly want to comment upon here.

The Gift of Singleness

My reason for including this among the gifts is twofold. Paul implies that the *charis* of God is a precondition for meaningful, productive singleness (1 Cor. 7:7), and the single person is free from the concerns of marriage so he or she may serve the Lord fully.

This gift, singleness, comes from the Greek word *agamos* (ag-a-mos) which means "to be unmarried, unattached, unbound." The scriptural base is found in 1 Cor. 7:32–35 and also can be seen by implication in verse 7.

